

BEDROCK'S PARTNER *by* **HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS**

FEBRUARY

15¢

Adventure



GORDON YOUNG
CLYDE WANTLAND

SERGEANT BLACK SHEEP
NOVELETTE BY
GEORGES SURDEZ

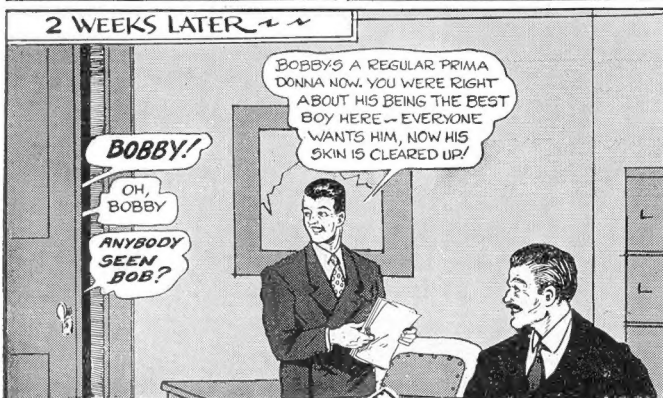
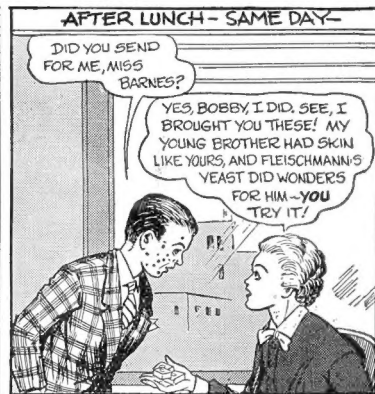
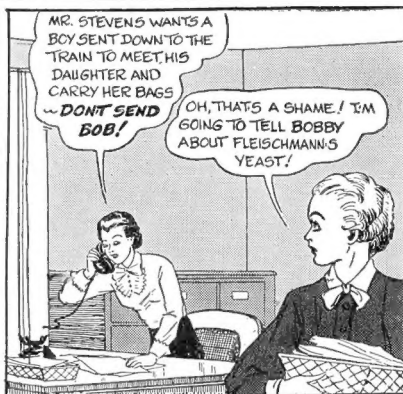
FEBRUARY

ADVENTURE



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Adventure

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Vol. 94, No. 4

for

Published Once A Month

February, 1936

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A Novelette—

SERGEANT BLACK SHEEP

A LEGIONNAIRE came running toward the firing line.

"The Fourth Section, Sergeant Fontarge, Sergeant Fontarge!"

"This way—"

Fontarge lifted his hand to call attention, but did not rise. He was crouching fifty feet to the rear of the automatic rifles, and three hundred and some meters beyond the hammering weapons, concealed in the brush, behind convenient boulders, or sunk in the shallow rifle-pits hastily dug during the preced-

ing night, a considerable number of hill-men, Beni Zegguts and other clans of the Middle-Atlas wielded an amazing assortment of fire-arms, ranging from Lebel's and Mausers, through Gras, Martinis and Chassepots, to antiquated flintlocks.

The sergeant, a tall, broad young man of twenty-four, who believed himself rather handsome, did not wish to have his features marred needlessly. The messenger trotted up to kneel at his side. At once, the shimmering cloud of



By GEORGES SURDEZ

greedy flies which had centered around Fontarge's head spun a drift toward fresh prey.

"The captain says you're too far ahead—"

Fontarge knew this to be true. His detachment formed a spearhead in the advance, well ahead of the other groups of the Second Company and the flanking section of native infantry on his left. But if the old man expected him to preserve a mathematically straight line across the face of the hill at the risk of

losing a few Legionnaires, he could howl as much as he wished, or come up to see for himself.

"No cover!" the sergeant shouted above the din. "You tell him that the ground was as bare as the palm of his hand. Tell him I'll be all right, if only I get ammunition up."

"Can't send ammunition," the runner retorted.

"What the devil's wrong now?"

"Captain's trying to find out. Lieutenant Marcassin, in charge of the am-

munition echelon, is reported wounded. The slobs must have cut in our rear, somewhere in the ravine. Captain says we may have to break contact and that you should watch for the green smoke signal and try not to leave any one behind."

"Thinks of everything, eh? I get it, all right!"

Fontarge was furious. Two battalions, one of them belonging to the Legion, checked by mountaineers! And he had predicted himself that the line of communications was not safe—more dead to pay for rashness of the staff! The ammunition held up, and his gunners using what they had recklessly, as if cartridges grew on bushes!

"Hassler, Frentzel! Getting those guns too hot—space your bursts!" Sullen, red, streaming faces turned toward him briefly. He saw the lips move, and knew it was not a polite acknowledgment. But they obeyed. The runner was still squatted at his side. "I said all right. You can leave."

"I'll make a bet, Sergeant—"

Fontarge swept the runner with a startled glance. He could not recall seeing him before. There were corporal's chevrons on his tunic, a brand new issue with the wool of the collar tabs still bright. One of the replacement draft. A large, athletic man, a Russian or, in any case, a Slav, probably a former officer, judging by his excellent French and ease of manner. He gave a first impression of clean, pink and blond skin, and was undeniably handsome. The age was hard to guess, for the lines near his mouth, the wrinkles close to his greenish eyes, might be the result of suffering, illness or debauchery as easily as of elapsed years. Somewhere over thirty—

"What's the bet, Corporal?"

"That the swine know what has happened back of us, and that they'll be down on us before we are withdrawn."

"Counter attack? Against these?" Fontarge glanced at the automatics. "They're wild but not crazy."

"That's the question. The bet doesn't include unsuccessful starts, but a determined rush that will reach our line." The corporal smiled, showed strong, white, even teeth. "Heard you liked to bet. Month's pay against month's pay. The difference in ranks makes good odds—"

"You said it," Fontarge grumbled. "I'll take you. But if you win, you may never collect."

"Which accounts for the odds, Sergeant."

"That's fair," Fontarge laughed. "Better leave now."

"If it's the same to you, I'd like to stick around. If we retire, I'll be along. If not, I'm saving myself a walk by waiting for the captain here. There may be some excitement."

Again, Fontarge had to shout to the gunners to keep the proper cadence, bursts of three to five shots. Then he looked at the corporal again. The fellow intrigued him, and the conversation, considering the place and time, was amusing. This chap no doubt believed himself a character, and had grown somewhat theatrical.

"Craving excitement? How long have you been in the Legion?"

"Seven years, Sergeant." The liaison man verified the loading of his carbine, jerked the bayonet in place. "And I saw a lot of this sort of business elsewhere, from first to last. Listen to them howling! Working themselves up to the job. They'll be coming soon."

Fontarge did not believe it. He was not a novice, had seen fighting in both Middle and Grand Atlas, in the Sahara. In this campaign the enemy had fought cautiously, craftily. They were too smart to rush on organized infantry. Moreover, they did not like to face Legion bayonets.

The sergeant had believed that fear had been wrung out of his soul as fat had melted from his frame. But he experienced something very much like panic, an awed, icy terror, when the first group of mountaineers rose and

charged. There were not ten of them and they lasted less than thirty seconds. All four automatics had swerved and caught them in withering blasts.

"See?" Fontarge called over his shoulder.

Nothing could live long before automatic fire, and those chaps must know it. But they must have been insane with fighting passion, for another group emerged from cover, a few yards to the side, a third, a fourth, until a swarm of men was racing down hill, bounding and bouncing like puppets on strings, screaming and brandishing clubbed rifles, sticks and knives.

"Allah—ah—Allah—ah!"

Although many fell, the others seemed to slip in invisible safety lanes between the streams of lead. There was no sense in shouting orders, for the gun crews welcomed such magnificent targets. The protection riflemen forgot elementary caution, rose in full sight to shoot faster. The ground was strewn with dead, crawling with wounded.

But the seconds passed, and the living were two hundred yards closer, coming fast. Brawny, half-nude fellows, some of them almost negroid, they were animated by racial pride and a ferocious hate of the invaders. Fontarge estimated that there might be four to five hundred directly before him, and more on the flanks. In another quarter of a minute the human avalanche would strike.

"Fix—bayonets!"

Again his call was useless, for the majority of his men had anticipated the order. The sunlight glittered on the needle-like, quadrangular blades. The Legion was waiting. But the natives did not halt, did not falter, headed bravely for the bare steel.

"Hold on! Hold on! Keep shooting!"

The gun sergeants sought to keep the automatics in play, feeling that it was a matter of seconds before the attack stopped. But blind instinct was urging

the gunners to their feet. It takes iron nerves to wait in a prone position.

As in a nightmare, Fontarge saw the right wing of the native's charge, far ahead of the rest, roll upon the Native Infantry. In an instant, each automatic became the core of a whirling, shouting huddle, from which dropped dead and wounded. The hair bristled on the nape of his neck when he saw the falling soldiers caught, slashed and hacked by women and boys who followed their warriors.

This was no more than a flitting vision, for the attack was reaching his men. From the brush, between the rocks, out of the very soil, new assailants appeared, like insects coming out after a downpour. They were too many to count to estimate. Fontarge wondered where all those people had been hidden.

He ran toward Number Four gun.



THREE hillmen had grappled with the gunner, a powerful Dane, forcing him back. Others were picking up the automatic, clutching at the red-hot barrel. They did not appear to feel pain as they held on to steel so hot that it seared the flesh from their palms. They behaved like maniacs or drugged men. There was nothing for Fontarge to do save fight—He could not control the situation as a whole; discipline was useless in the murderous brawl.

He knew that the other groups were attacked, he could hear a tremendous uproar of confused shouting, as the detonations scattered, almost died out. Sharp whistle blasts cut through the tumult. But he ignored everything in a new terror that killed physical fear: He must not lose a gun!

His pistol was empty. He vaguely recalled the impacts against his wrist as he fired. He tossed the weapon aside, unslung the carbine from his shoulder. He dodged the first struggling knots of men and ran after the pair, very likely

detailed for the task in advance, who had picked up the gun to carry it away. He was quivering with righteous indignation.

The iron-shod butt struck the nearer in the small of the back. The other dropped the automatic and slid forward. Above the beard, his face was all distended nostrils and dilated eyes. He held a long, thin blade in his fist. Fontarge swung and cracked his skull at the first blow.

Others crowded toward the sergeant, jostling each other in their eagerness. He realized that he had not fixed his bayonet, and kept them off, parrying and striking with the muzzle. But they were forcing him away from the gun. It was like a sinister game, as the natives clutched at his carbine, trying to tear it from his grasp. While one was pulling, another would beat along the barrel with a club, trying to mash his fingers.

A rangy Legionnaire mixed into this small episode of the general mêlée, contributing a few swinging blows, only to vanish as unexpectedly as he had appeared.

"Why, that was Jaeger," Fontarge thought. "He's in the First Section."

This thought vibrated through his confused brain annoyingly. Although his eyes were on his immediate foes, he caught sight of men he knew, brief, distorted glimpses. Captain Sarrazin must have launched the whole company to stem the rush. For that was the only course—trying to retreat would only carry the hand-to-hand fight down the slope. The issue must be settled where started.

The Legion must have scored partial success somewhere, cleared a sector of the front, for automatics were pounding again. But those before Fontarge did not run.

He tripped over some unseen obstacle, probably a body, lost his balance. The carbine was wrenched from his hands. There was the salty taste of blood in

his mouth; he could feel the warmth of the flow down his face, on his chin. He clenched his fists and punched away. They were so eager to knock him over and finish him that they got into one another's way.

Fontarge felt a sharp pain in his thigh, found his leg weighed by something heavy, squirming. He looked down, saw greasy black hair, the smooth, orange-hued skin of a rounded shoulder. A woman had dodged near, was biting him. Her fingers sought to grip and twist his flesh. He fell backward, kicked her off with his free leg. And as he did this, he knew he was done for—

There was an impact on his head, another. A fiery wheel bloomed and spun, crackling, inside his skull. But he knew he was still alive, because the sun's glare ached in his eyes. In another second, they would slash his throat, stab his chest!

Instinct drove his spread fingers to shield his face, as he lay there, waiting for the finishing stroke.

Nothing happened. He opened his eyes, propped himself on an elbow, the other arm bent guarding his head. What were they waiting for?

He first saw a pair of legs garbed in khaki cloth, a naked shin from which straggled an unwound puttee, a bit of olive stuff that whipped and dragged about. Looking up, Fontarge recognized the corporal who had brought up a message.

The man was motion and strife incarnate. His bayonet had been snapped off ten inches from the tip, but he used the foot-long splinter of steel in alternation with the butt. He was everywhere and nowhere, hitting as with a sledgehammer, as elusive as a floating feather. He did not brace his feet, but lunged on the wing!

There was a definite, flowing ease to the performance. It was more like dancing than fighting. This Legionnaire had flair and planning as well as physi-

cal ability. He did not fight as a panther fights, but as a panther with a cool human brain might fight. He matched his opponents' ferocity and awed them with his superb skill! He did not parry blows, he forestalled them, one against seven or eight. There was in the spectacle something that forced admiration, something like the sensation experienced when a fine horse runs a good race, a crack athlete dominates his field, an acrobat performs his special stunt.

A skull smashed here, a chest gored there, a swift spin of the carbine—a native crouched, clutched at his middle, howling. The corporal achieved deeds that were impossible. Feinting for a lunge at breast level, he would allow his body to drop horizontally to the ground, check himself with one hand on the soil, strike out knee high, upward. After driving his stump of metal into a man's groin, he recovered, dodged aside, leaped back on guard again. All alone against several, he seemed the attacker!

Fontarge picked himself up, rose with a huge rifle dropped by a native, a weapon weighing fourteen or fifteen pounds, with a breech as massive and imposing as a cannon's. The four surviving natives saw him coming and fled.

To no purpose, for an automatic swerved toward them, and brought them down before they reached cover. Fontarge reeled and sat down suddenly. He seemed to float along on a wave of nausea for a moment. When he recovered, Terjen, the gunner, was inserting a clip in the recovered weapon. His uniform was in shreds; he was cut about the face and hands. But he grinned reassuringly toward the sergeant.

"It works fine!"

The surviving natives had resumed shooting from cover. The combat continued at long range after the end of the charge. Fontarge fingered his skull gingerly, felt a brace of enormous lumps. There was a gash above his right eye, which still bled. But he had been lucky

at that. For a few seconds, his life had not been worth a sou.

"You're a smart lad," some one said at his side.

It was Captain Sarrazin, standing propped on his thick thighs, wiping the leather-band of his képi-bald skull exposed to the sun. He glared at Fontarge, but the sergeant saw that he was rather pleased than angry. The graying mustache twitched under the big, hooked nose.

"They almost cut your section off. If that's the way you lead, I better not slate you for a commission. I know the excuse: No cover. Used it myself at times." Sarrazin replaced his headgear and looked over at the enemy's positions, hands on his hips. Fontarge knew better than to urge him to caution. The captain was vain. "Had a close call, didn't you, young fellow?"

"Yes." Fontarge remembered that he owed some one thanks. There was no need to look far. The corporal was in the liaison group halted a few feet away. He was so quiet that if it had not been for the bare shin, the sergeant would have believed he had mistaken his rescuer. "Captain, the corporal over there helped me out—"

"Kasmirkoff? Alias Kaspar." Sarrazin glanced at the man. "Yes, he's a fair fighter. But once you've said that, you've said it all. D'you hear, whatever your name may be?"

"Yes, Captain."

"I suppose I'll have to make him sergeant. It's useless, but just. Fontarge—" Sarrazin appeared to wish to speak more, then broke off with a shrug. "That can wait! Here's the ammunition now, and we have a job to finish before night."

The Legion battalion held the crests at sunset, as scheduled.



THREE days later the column camped on a wide plain, while peace terms were discussed with emissaries sent

by the weakening tribes. Behind the earth and stone parapet and the uncoiled barbed wire, a small city of tents sprang up, faded canvas standing out white on the reddish soil. Over four thousand men serving the Third French Republic were gathered there, a multi-colored crowd recruited from as many races as composed the legions of Rome or Carthage.

On the following afternoon, partly to impress the visiting mountaineers, the general passed a review, presided at the routine ceremonies when citations were read and awards announced. Fontarge was mentioned, which meant another silver star for the ribbon of his Colonial Cross. He shrugged at his own pleasure. Napoleon had said that men are governed with trinkets. However, it would help his chances of an appointment to Saint-Maixent School, which meant a commission.

He was more elated when he heard that Captain Sarrazin had acted on his suggestion and recognized Kaspar's extraordinary feat of arms:

"Kaspar, Anatole-Jerome, Corporal, Number 9543, Second Company. Brave and energetic corporal; dispatched on liaison over ground swept by the enemy's fire, accomplished his mission and volunteered to remain and fight in the most exposed spot; killed or wounded several foes in a hand-to-hand encounter, thereby saving the life of a non-commissioned officer."

A convoy of supplies arrived from the north, with a powerful escort. A plane from Meknes dropped the mail sacks. In this remote plain between the bleak hills, routine army existence was starting. The traders opened their establishments under canvas, and when the men drew back pay they crowded into the improvised cafés and bars.

Until this time Fontarge had been unable to speak more than a few words to Kaspar. His gratitude had not dwindled, and a surge of warm admira-

tion flooded him whenever he thought of his narrow escape. But for the brave chap, he, Fontarge, would have been beneath one of the small piles of stones that marked the progress of the expedition.

The sergeant located Kaspar hovering before the Greek's bar, erect, handsome, formal, but with restless eyes. At sight of him, the corporal came to attention, saluted. After shaking hands, Fontarge handed him a sheaf of hundred and fifty franc notes.

"One bet I'm happy to pay!" he said, smiling.

"And money never came so superbly timed, Sergeant," Kaspar replied. "I've been scraping my pockets and all I got was tobacco dust under my nails! See, I joined with the replacements, and was paid in Tazza—and not an old friend in the company!" His fingers quivered as he handled the bills. "By the way, many thanks for the citation. Know you are responsible, for the captain doesn't like me much."

"No trouble, the least I could do," Fontarge protested. "Any time you need me in any way, you'll find me ready to help out. It's awkward to express, but one has only one life and—"

"Say no more, Sergeant," Kaspar replied. He then used a phrase which was to grow familiar. "A gentleman understands."

He had a peculiar fashion of uttering these words, his inflection giving them a rounder, fuller meaning, lifting him and the man he addressed in spheres above the rest of humanity. Fontarge was to learn that not the least puzzling of Kaspar's many tricks was to patronize his superiors and appear to be flattering them when granting them equality!

"A drink, Sergeant?"

"Why, yes—thanks."

They entered the long canvas shelter, pushed their way through the men crowded before the row of packing-cases representing a bar. Fontarge was not

wholly at ease. The Legion is democratic, but along its own lines. While a colonel may click glasses with a private and be admired for it, company commanders frown on sergeants who associate too intimately with subordinates. They figure that it is hard to be obeyed by a man with whom one has been drinking.

The Greek shoved a brace of thick glass tumblers before them. On one, fragments of a jam label still clung.

"Cognac!" Kaspar ordered tersely.

"Two?"

"A bottle."

The Greek slammed a bottle of pretty good brandy on the counter, picked up the grimy bills. Fontarge watched the golden liquid rise three fingers' width in his tumbler. "Served!"

Kaspar filled his own glass to the brim. Fontarge saw a moist glow in his green pupils and began to understand why such a man was merely a corporal after several years. The Russian mumbled a polite toast, touched glasses and swallowed. While Fontarge sipped, he filled and drained the tumbler again. It was an astounding spectacle. In three minutes the bottle was half-emptied.

"He'll collapse at the next glass," Fontarge thought.

There was no sense in remaining to offer a second bottle. He excused himself and left.

A burly man with three rows of ribbons on his chest halted him outside. It was Adjutant Beverloo, the senior non-com of the company, a veteran of the pre-War and glorious Legion. As a rule, Beverloo addressed Fontarge with consideration, scenting a future officer. But he was now stern, serious. Fontarge explained the situation briefly.

"Saved your life, eh? Well, you did him a fine favor, giving him money! We'll have a load of drunken meat to rake up by night." Beverloo's indignation was pathetic and amusing. He was a notorious white wine drunkard him-

self. But when off duty. "In town, I'd say nothing. But here, in a camp, where officers know everything that happens!"

"Bah, he'll be knocked out before long, *mon adjudant*—at the rate he is going."

"Him? I've known that guy a long time, met him when he called himself Kasmirkoff and was a sergeant. You could put him in a full barrel of cognac, nail down the lid, and he wouldn't drown—he'd drink. And walk straight when he was let out, too."

"Kasmirkoff?" Fontarge stopped short. "I've heard the name."

"You bet you have."

As Beverloo strode away, Fontarge sought to remember what he had heard concerning Kasmirkoff. Nothing very good, he was sure, although he could recall no details.

That Kasmirkoff was now Kaspar meant little in the Foreign Legion. Men there change names for a number of reasons: because they must give their real identities to become French citizens, because they have redeemed themselves in their own eyes. Fontarge himself had served under an assumed name and nationality for three years, until he had been able to write home to announce that he wore chevrons and the military medal.

He was free until midnight, when he had to take his turn of guard duty at the enclosure. His orderly, a Lorrainer named Stenay, shook him awake, and had important news.

"Big row at the trader's. Some of our guys fought the patrol, and one of them got a cracked head. It's a wonder the yelling didn't get you up, Sergeant."

"Anybody arrested?"

"Only the guy who's hurt. They took him to the ambulance. The rest got away. Nobody wants to squeal."

Fontarge laced his boots, stepped out of the tent under the star-dusted sky. The wind from the northern hills was keen and bracing. He thought it would

be a splendid night for a raid, moonless, yet with a translucent, unreal glow. It was good to be alive.

"That you, Fontarge?" Captain Sarrazin appeared near-by. He led the sergeant away from the tents and the guards. "Heard you gave Kaspar money. Don't jump at conclusions. Adjutant Beverloo admitted it only when the trader named him as a witness. It was a foolish thing to do—with a few francs each, the men would have kept to wine. But Kaspar gave them cognac and egged them on. The man is possessed of the devil when he's drinking."

"It was a bet, Captain!"

"Make it a principle not to bet with an inferior, at least one you don't know very well. Cigarette?" Sarrazin accepted a light in exchange, resumed in a friendly tone. "You see, he had found out your weakness in advance, and played on it. He's fooled older and wiser men than you. The general doesn't want a court-martial and an investigation now. But look out! In any case, I shall not nominate Kaspar for sergeant."

Fontarge would have accepted the decision quietly as a rule. But he felt it would be cowardly to keep silence when he might do a good turn for a man who had saved his life. He grew quite eloquent, and sensed that Sarrazin was shaken.

"It will be useless, young man. This will make the fourth time he's a sergeant. Makes a joke of the whole system. However, as I have been ordered not to pry into the affair, I suppose it would not be just to punish him even indirectly. But no good will come of it, no good."

In the next few days Fontarge assembled a fairly complete biography of his rescuer. It was a bizarre, picturesque collection of anecdotes.



KASPAR had first appeared in the Legion under the name of Fedor Kasmirkoff. From various sources, his past history was established: Good Russian

family, bearing still another name, a cavalry officer. After a few months of war he had won the Cross of Saint-George, the Sword-Knot of Saint Theresa. He had come to France in 'seventeen, an officer in the corps that sailed around the World from Vladivostock to Marseilles, less for absolutely military purposes than to brace the morale of the French. He was exceedingly brave, and had won French, Belgian, British decorations.

He had been in scrapes even then, held and questioned, notably, in the shooting of an important civilian over a woman. After the Armistice, Russia being closed to him, he had spent shadowy years in Paris. Some claimed to have known him as a professional dancer in night clubs, others insisted that he had handled a commission business operating on the margin of legitimate commerce. But all that was the past, and no concern of any one in the Legion.

Kasmirkoff had started brilliantly, a corporal in six months, a sergeant in a year. It was known that he drank, but as his weakness did not then interfere with his duties, his officers shut their eyes to his private behavior. With the Third Regiment in Morocco, he had distinguished himself again and again.

Sent on convalescence to Saida, Algeria, he had become engaged to the daughter of a café-keeper. He had jilted the girl at the last moment, as was perhaps his right. But her father proved that Kasmirkoff had obtained money from him with the worn-out story that he had a fortune in jewels in Russia, which would be smuggled out to him if he paid another person's passage out of the country. At the intervention of his chiefs, the civil case was dropped. But Kasmirkoff was demoted to the ranks.

By special favor, for Oriental service is coveted by Legionnaires, he was assigned to the relief battalion bound for Indo-China. By the time the ship

reached Asia Kasmirkoff had won his way into the heart of the major commanding. His knowledge of languages, his charm of manner, his obvious education and breeding, called favorable attention. He landed as a sergeant.

While supply-sergeant in a small outpost on the Chinese Frontier he skipped over the border with a few thousand francs obtained from crooked transactions. It was believed that the Legion had seen the last of him, that he would join some Russian refugees' colony in the North, or become a soldier of fortune in one of the piratical armies devastating China.

After two months' absence and a series of adventures never fully known, he was delivered, trussed up like a pig bound for market, at a French outpost of the Tonkin hills, and the small reward promised those who capture deserters was paid.

Kasmirkoff had been tried, stripped of chevrons and medals and sent to France to spend a year in jail. Then he had been returned to Algeria to serve out his enlistment. He was a brave man, but a trouble-maker, so when he sought to reenlist he was urged to seek his luck elsewhere. As due him, he received transportation to the place of his enlistment.

Three months later several officers and non-coms recognized him in a draft of recruits marching into the barrack-yard at Sidi-bel-Abbès. He was erect, cool, supercilious.

"You're Kasmirkoff—"

"I beg your pardon, I am Kaspar, Anatole-Jerome," Kaspar replied cheerfully. "There must be a great resemblance, as the recruiting officer at Fort Saint-Jean, in Marseilles, addressed me by the same name. But it's a trifle boring."

"We'll write to the police for your finger-prints."

"I was given to understand," Kaspar retorted with insolence, "that your regu-

lations forbade your probing into a man's past. Granting, for the sake of argument, that I am Kasmirkoff, you admit I served a jail sentence for whatever crime I committed. I have a right to a fresh start."

The colonel was consulted and found Kaspar's claim logical. The Legion offers a man a new chance, the opportunity to atone for his past. Kasmirkoff had paid for his misdeeds in the Corps. The Legion could not refuse him another try.

But to avoid trouble he was sent to a small, desolate outpost of the Saharan Territories, where a few picked men of his kind were stationed. They were commanded by a middle-aged lieutenant, who was there as an unofficial punishment for deplorable behavior up north, who alternated fits of delirium with spells of malaria. And it was this crew of rogues, commanded by a failure, that overhauled a strong band of mounted raiders, surprised them at a water hole and proceeded to annihilate them.

The lieutenant died a hero's death, the sergeant was severely wounded, and Kaspar, senior corporal in the outfit by virtue of his education, conducted the fight to a successful finish and led the return trip.

Obstinately, grimly, he kept the thirsty soldiers going, the wounded alive, for three nights and two days, not leaving behind a corpse, a wounded man, a prisoner, not a captured animal. The gloomy caravan reeled into an outpost hours after a warped version of the combat had been sent out, announcing complete disaster, the massacre of the Legion detachment.

Kaspar was awarded the chevrons of sergeant, the Military Medal, the Colonial Cross, by cable from the Minister of War. He posed for photographs published in France. And, redeemed, he was sent to a small garrison town along the Saharan railway, somewhere between Ain-Seffra and El Kreider. Within a

fortnight he was engaged to be married to the daughter of a railroad employee of some importance.

His captain was a gruff, very ugly man of forty, who professed little sympathy for heroes and their admirers. He sent for Kaspar, asked him straight from the shoulder whether he intended to treat his present fiancée as he had the girl in Saida.

"A gentleman understands," Kaspar replied, "that one must pass the time some way." Then he reminded his chief that no matter what he might be in Africa, he was a Russian officer, and could not consider a *mésalliance*.

Upon which, the captain revealed what he knew to the girl's father, with whom he played cards every night at the café. Kaspar was refused admittance when he next called at the house.

Rightly or wrongly, he deemed that the captain had done him a dirty trick, humiliated him publicly. And he said he would square matters. At first glance that appeared most difficult, as he was a sergeant starting a feud against a captain. Kaspar might shoot the man, which was risky, but beyond that, what could he do?

The sergeant studied his enemy. And he discovered that the company commander, perhaps seriously, perhaps to kill time in a dreary sojourn, answered matrimonial ads in certain Paris papers. Kaspar wrote in to insert an ad which gave a serial box number instead of an address. The newspaper office forwarded all mail.

WIDOW, independent means, young, pretty, affectionate, desires correspondence object matrimony with honorable gentleman, army officer or government employee, between forty and forty-five years old. Reply Box 504, this paper.

The captain rose to the bait. Kaspar dictated answers to one of his women friends in the reserved quarter, professed wild admiration for the African warrior

and coaxed letters as deliriously affectionate from the officer. At the end of a few months the men who played cards with the captain received his love letters, across which sarcastic comments were scrawled.

The story spread in the scanty European population of the town. The captain would come to play cards, and even his oldest friends laughed as he twisted his stringy mustache, blinked his protruding eyes, and thought of sentences he had written describing his charms:

"Although forty, I'm the remnants of a good-looking man, well-preserved, sound of wind, hoofs and eyes, with everything to make a lovely lady happy!"

At last, laughter louder than usual forced the captain to ask explanations. He was a courageous, determined man, and the others saw that he could be deceived no longer. They expected an outburst of rage. But the captain simply nodded.

"Yes, I suppose I appear foolish."

For a week, he acted as usual, played cards evenings. He even joked about the letters, when the others refrained to mention them from embarrassment. Then it was learned that he had applied for transfer to Morocco. Did he hope to escape? That was impossible, for gossip had spread from mess to mess in every North African station. His own men, who were fond enough of him, nevertheless nicknamed him "The Widow."

Three days before his scheduled departure he remained in bed. He was removed to the hospital, declared too sick to be allowed to leave. At first, it was believed to be a simple case of jaundice. Then the doctors started to mention liver and spleen, organs deteriorated by long years in the tropics.

In less than three weeks the poor chap died, slain by shame and humiliation. And a surge of sympathy was felt for him.

Kaspar was sent for, as the most likely

culprit. He refused to answer questions, refused to surrender his chevrons voluntarily, made it clear that he would protest a transfer. As a matter of fact, under the law, he had committed no crime. Even when anonymous letters are sent, which was not the case, only a few weeks' imprisonment are inflicted. Shooting a man is called murder, breaking his heart a slight misdemeanor!

Military regulations made no provision for the case. Kaspar had received the letters, they were his own. The comments on them were not in his handwriting.

But there were ways of reaching him. The next time he made a slip in his duties—no man can avoid an occasional lapse—he got the limit. Loss of decorations and chevrons, transfer to the Second Regiment in Morocco from a comfortable existence, a month in a cell. At Tazza an officer who did not know his story appointed him corporal, on his appearance. And he was to receive chevrons for the fourth time, the Military Medal for the third!



FONTARGE had few occasions to meet Kaspar during the rest of the campaign. Captain Sarrazin had assigned the Russian to a detachment specialized in night raiding, where his fighting qualities could be displayed and his private faults forgotten.

Beverloo hinted to Fontarge that the captain was watching for a chance to kill Kaspar's promotion to sergeant. But during his brief sojourns in camp, the fellow behaved himself well, probably because he did not care for the simple pleasures to be enjoyed on a corporal's pay and had no means of obtaining large sums.

Kaspar's personality changed when on active service; he was an obedient, resourceful, clean soldier as well as a brave man. His supple, deferential speech made him a favorite of his immediate

superiors. His experience of combat was vast, and he knew how to proffer advice, speaking as if merely to confirm for his own guidance something which his chief already must have decided upon.

Several weeks later, when the battalion, withdrawn from the hills, reached its assigned garrison at Dar-Makanbas, northwest of Tazza along the narrow-gauge railway, Kaspar, who had been acting-sergeant for two months, was permitted to have chevrons stitched on his cuffs. And while the four companies were establishing themselves in barracks just evacuated by another outfit, Captain Sarrazin summoned Fontarge to his office.

"I learn that you have passed the written tests for school, and your assignment is up for the colonel's approval, in Meknes." The officer rubbed his skull as if smoothing hair that had long since fallen out. "You'll probably leave us in a couple of months. Meanwhile, I'll use you as a secretary. It'll relieve you from drill and chores. You'll also take charge of the sergeants' mess."

This was a thoughtful action. For one with some knowledge of bookkeeping, the task was simple, routine, and would not consume more than a few hours each day. Fontarge would have leisure to study.

"Don't forget to inform your father. He'll be pleased."

"All right, thank you, Captain."

Sarrazin had the reputation of being a martinet, some of the men called him a "bloodsucker" and a "cow". But he was very kind to those he liked, until something happened to change his mood. When Fontarge reached the non-coms' quarters, across the esplanade, he saw Kaspar waiting for him before the low, whitewashed building. It was good to greet him as an equal. Despite all he had heard, Fontarge still reserved judgment. One had to know all to understand all.

"Have you any plans for tonight, Fon-

targe? Maybe we can celebrate together. I know a fine place to go, private home."

"Quiet?"

"Hell, no. Good sports, fine people." Kaspar gestured widely. "Another thing: I'm assigned to a room with three other sergeants. Splendid chaps, but you understand—another breed altogether! You are in with Beverloo? I just heard that as we are to be here at least six months, his wife's coming from Algeria, and he'll take a house outside. Could it be arranged for us to be together?"

"Sure. Delighted."

Fontarge was sincere. He preferred Kaspar to Beverloo as a roommate. The Belgian spent his evenings smoking a pipe, drinking white wine, soaking his feet in a pail of lukewarm water and had an annoying habit of reading aloud from whatever he looked at. He snored and borrowed tooth-brushes without warning. And he cluttered the walls with pictures of his wife, a squat Algerian-Spaniard, and his five children.

Kaspar returned with his knapsack and musette-bags. A corporal is not allowed much baggage. But what he had was expensive, even luxurious—a silver-mounted toilet-kit, including a perfume-vaporizer, crystal boxes, a pair of silver epaulettes ornamented with stars.

"I left a lot of stuff behind," Kaspar shrugged. "You must have heard, when I was reduced to the ranks. I'll send for it."

"If you need anything of mine in the meanwhile—" Fontarge suggested.

"Glad you spared my asking you first." Kaspar looked up gratefully. "Look, I have those chevrons sewed on my government-issue tunic. Looks like hell. Could I borrow one of your uniforms until I get a new one? We're about the same size—"

"Help yourself—" Fontarge said largely, throwing back the lid of his trunk, forwarded by the regimental depot.

The next moment he realized that he

should have made a selection himself. Kaspar unerringly chose the best uniform, his finest leathers, pawed over the handkerchiefs until he located a pet khaki silk. He appropriated the best pair of leggings. Fontarge was about to make a mild protest, but Kaspar seemed to read his mind:

"I didn't know what a favor I was doing myself when I saved your bacon down in the hills! You've got some fine stuff!" He contemplated the uniform with boyish enthusiasm, then grew grave. "Say, I haven't collected any pay as sergeant as yet. Could you tide me over until the fifteenth?"

Fontarge might have reminded him that he had received at least one month of a sergeant's pay. But he brought out a wallet, containing his savings for more than a year: "How much?"

"Spending money, deposit on new clothes—let's say a couple of thousand."

Fontarge had expected to be asked for five hundred at most. How could Kaspar return about five times what he would draw on pay-day? There was no help for it. The two thousand vanished.

"Thanks a lot!" Kaspar sat down on a cot, looked seriously at his comrade: "You must think I have a lot of nerve getting all this from you. It's all as if I were taking advantage of your gratitude. But don't worry, old chap, you'll get it all back on the fifteenth. I know where to get some dough."

"You're lucky," Fontarge said, with a trace of doubt.

"I have outside connections," Kaspar explained. "I'm no kid—thirty-four. I've made an ass of myself plenty, but from now on, I am wise. I have thirty-six months to go on this enlistment. By that time I'll locate a fine position in civilian life. Settle down. Meanwhile, I better see how my guys are making out."

He hurried out of the room. Fontarge considered his expenditure ruefully. Still, he could not well refuse the loan of clothing, of money, to a man to whom

he owed everything. But for Kaspar, there would be an additional mound in the hills, bearing the name of Paul Fontarge, sergeant, Second Company. That must never be wholly forgotten.

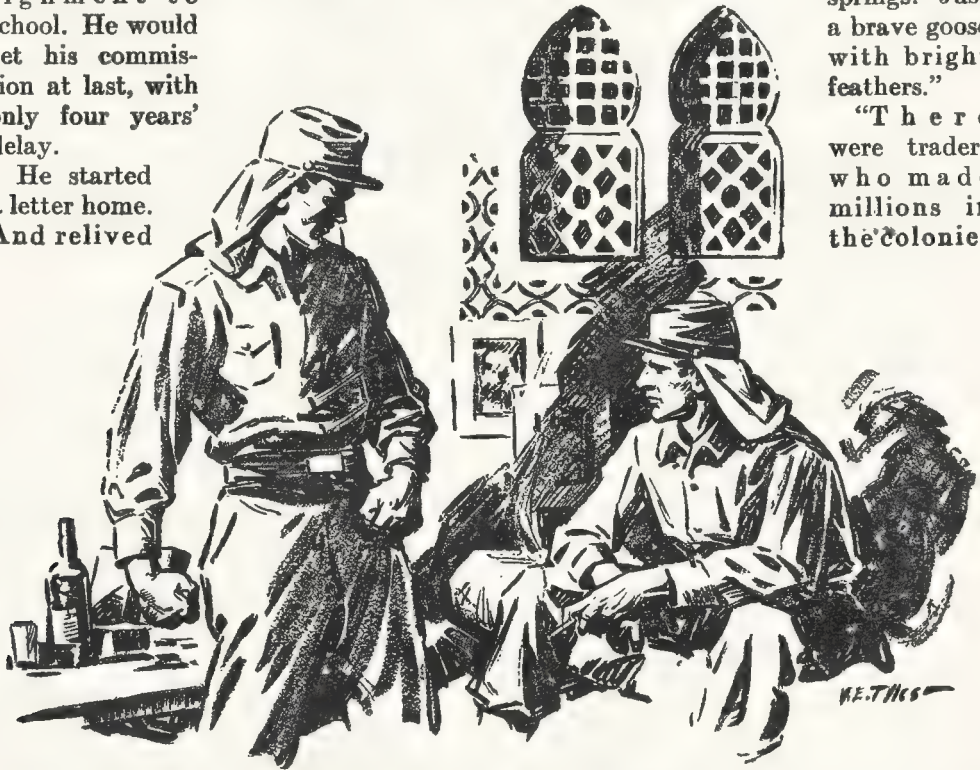
And he was lucky, so lucky that he should not mind doing a man less fortunate a favor. He could write home, announce his return to France, his assignment to school. He would get his commission at last, with only four years' delay.

He started a letter home. And relived

that the army was not a promising career.

"Get into business. That's the way wars will be fought from now on," he stated. "It doesn't matter how many soldiers a nation has, but how many pounds, francs, dollars. What's a captain compared to some bright chap who manufactures gasoline pumps or bed-springs? Just a brave goose with bright feathers."

"There were traders who made millions in the colonies



the past.

He had always hoped to be an officer. Naturally enough, for his father had served in the cavalry, had distinguished himself during the conquest of the Sudan. He had resigned and married, become the manager of factories in eastern France. Recalled to the colors during the War, he had again left the service as a colonel.

Although it was well known that the older Fontarge had been a wild young man, too fond of gambling and drinking, he did not encourage such failings in his children. He assured Paul, several times,

you conquered, father," Paul replied. "Pear-trees don't produce pumpkins."

At nineteen, having completed preliminary studies, he was sent to Paris to prepare for St. Cyr, the military academy. But though he registered for courses, and even attended one occasionally, he gathered considerable information on night-life and very little on Jomini, the canal system of France, the fortifications of the naval bases. He failed brilliantly, by so wide a margin that it was amusing.

He would have gone home to face a scolding. But he feared his father's sar-

casms, his ferocious mirth. In other days the colonial infantry would have drawn him, but the corps had gone to the dogs, so he was told, because it drafted conscripts. He enlisted in the Legion.

"After receiving my commission," he wrote, "I shall naturally return to the Legion. I hope to attain the rank of captain before thirty-one, with some good luck. As you must know, father, that is quite important. Gives one a chance to get a battalion before reaching the age when new ideas can not penetrate the brain—"



THIS was the start of a pleasant daydream. He would go home for his leave, after getting his commission. He would be no prodigal son but a hero with just a tinge of the irregular to make him intriguing. Certainly, he would be superior to the young chaps he had known, who had pivoted right and left for a few months in the garrison cities of France and the Rhineland.

"If Jeanne Merval is the snub-nosed kid who gushed over colts and puppies," he started a new paragraph, "tell her I do remember her. But offer my apologies in advance, won't you? I have learned much about rifles and grenades, but have had little leisure to play tennis or to dance. However, it may be more fun to teach the semi-savage I have become to participate in well-bred activities—"

This was setting the stage for a surprise. He handled a racket well—the non-coms at Bechar had had a tennis court—and Carmencita, the black-haired jane from Tetounan, whom he had known in Fez, had told him he tangoed like a gaucho.

Kaspar entered, whistling. He shaved and dressed rapidly.

"Come on. Just time for a bite at mess, then we start."

At seven, Fontarge was introduced to

Madame Dolonieu, still on the right side of forty, tall, dark, affected; to Miss Dolonieu, twenty, tall, light, tomboyish; to two young women of uncertain age and social classification; to a young employee of the tax office, and a traveling salesman placing orders for fancy groceries in North Africa. A comfortable home, in a house on a side street, belonging to Monsieur Dolonieu, government surveyor, absent on a business trip.

"Thank you so much for the champagne," Madame said at once.

"Don't mention it," Kaspar protested handsomely.

For a couple of hours, the gathering was decorous. They played cards, and Fontarge lost. He was annoyed, because he had identified his surroundings. A family running an unofficial café so that the man's small salary might be increased to meet the women's large desires. The specialty of the house was catering to pretentious young sergeants who liked a show of refinement. The bottles were opened and drunk rapidly, the native servant reported a shortage, madame fumbled for her purse, one of the guests intervened—

By ten o'clock, Fontarge's head swam from mixing brandy and champagne, anisette and chartreuse. His stomach was upset from too much canned goose, foie-gras, cookies and candies. A gramophone played, he danced. Dancing made him hot and thirsty, and he drank more iced champagne.

"Not much like a non-com's hangout, eh?" Kaspar whispered.

Fontarge approved. He was enjoying himself, no doubt of that. It was a fine evening, after months of loneliness and brutality in the hills. But it cost a lot. He had given five hundred francs at random for more liquor, and no one offered him change. And this was a refined home, not a public establishment where a man could slam the table and ask for change.

"Another drink, Popol?" some one addressed him.

"Sure. Let's dance."

He easily forgot distinction. The nickname had been used elsewhere. Paul, Popol—he was one of the gang. He lost track of place and time. Then Kaspar was calling his name, and he awoke, jaded, his mouth fuzzy and sour, in a darkened room.

"One-forty-five—just time to get back."

"Right with you." Fontarge buckled his belt with trembling fingers, buttoned his tunic. "Ready."

The streets were deserted, silent. The troopers' celebration of a safe return to civilization had stormed in the reserved quarter until midnight. Now, the last patrol had ordered the last door locked, the drunk slept the sleep of the just in their cells, the hurt were in the ambulance. Fontarge heard his footsteps echo between the walls in broken rhythm.

Beverloo was standing in the lighted doorway of the guard-room when the two passed the sentry. He exchanged a few words with Fontarge, grumbled and let him pass. A few more steps, a door opening, closing.

"Sergeant—"

It was light. Stenay was washing his face with cold water.

"Drink!" Fontarge begged.

The orderly handed him a cup of black coffee, scalding hot.

"Nearly seven, Sergeant. Captain will be at the office in a few minutes. You didn't undress. No time to change. I've hooked a fresh collar inside your neckband. Just fasten it and go."

Fontarge did not arrive three minutes before his chief. He felt that his face sagged, that his lids drooped. His hand quivered and moistened the sheet of the open ledger at which he pretended to work. The officer, fresh from his morning ride, seemed immensely strong, intelligent and menacing. He sat down, picked

up a pen, scratched away at his daily chore.

"Hang-over, Fontarge?"

"Just a bit, Captain."

"Well, you've earned a spree." Sarrazin signed documents for a moment, then, without stopping his work, resumed musingly. "When you get older, you'll learn to celebrate by degrees. It does little good to try to crowd six months' or a year's arrears into one evening. You live and learn."

Later, the officer handed certain company's accounts over to Fontarge, gave him the key to the strong-box in a drawer. The work assigned the sergeant was not complicated—handling the money for the mess, and the unit's *boni*, the surplus cash economized by a wise captain on the allowance granted by the government. All this offered no problem to Fontarge, who had commanded outposts in the hills and knew something of business affairs.

After that, Sarrazin appeared to hesitate.

"You were at the Dolonieu's last night— Oh, everything gets out rapidly in a town this size. Your private life is your own—but you have just assumed responsibilities. Dolonieu himself may be all right. He works hard and travels a good deal. But I can't say as much for the rest of that crowd. After all, it's a place where one pays for entertainment, isn't it? Expensive, too? I gathered so! Remember one thing. A distiller who doesn't label his bottles hides something. Entertainers who do not hang out signs are hypocrites. You understand me?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Normally, I would have returned you to the section. It might have been safer. But it is justice to give you a chance."

"I'll watch out, Captain."

"All right. Go and take a rest. Off until three," Sarrazin concluded.



IT IS possible that even if Kaspar had not saved his life, Fontarge would have been under his influence. The man had an extraordinary power to convince any one who listened to him. Things that held not the least shred of logic when calmly considered sounded plausible when he outlined them.

But there were moments in the following weeks when Fontarge sought to react. Admitting that he owed his very existence to Kaspar—and he was subtly reminded often enough—he nevertheless considered a break, a quarrel, even a fight. Once, he was at the point of asking the orderly to pile the other man's belongings in the passage. He pondered as to taking the captain or Beverloo into his confidence, seeking outside advice.

Then Kaspar would return, fill the room with his personality, toss gold-tipped cigarette stubs about, narrate a bit of gossip, a personal anecdote. Sometimes he would visit the company's office for a short talk with Fontarge, as if to keep him in hand. Even when the captain was present, he was not abashed. He addressed Sarrazin respectfully, lured him into conversation with a remark concerning the organization of Siberian militia or an episode of the winter campaign of fifteen, in the Carpathian Mountains.

Although he had obtained several new uniforms, he had never returned the one borrowed from Fontarge, nor the belt-
ing, nor the leggings, nor the cigarette-case he had fancied and taken "for the evening", nor a set of cuff-links. As for money, he had increased his indebtedness, by a hundred francs, by a bill of ten, of five francs, as the young sergeant's resources dwindled.

He seemed to be able to smell a money order in an envelope. His reputation was known in the battalion, yet there were no sergeants who had not been tricked into lending him something,

anything, which he never returned. A camera, a watch, a cane, a cravat.

In town, he owed for his clothes, for fancy boots, for cigarettes, for books. After two more visits at Madame Dolonieu's, Fontarge had been flat broke. Kaspar laughed when he made this fact clear, assured him that his credit was good and that it could all be arranged. And, no matter what good resolution he had made, Fontarge would accompany Kaspar.

"I'm a sucker," he often grumbled. "I should sock him on the nose and be done with him. He should understand—" Fontarge grinned despite himself, and repeated. "A gentleman understands!"

On one occasion he braced himself and asked Kaspar how he expected to pay what he owed, which must amount to several thousand francs, at least six months of a sergeant's pay. The other laughed with frank amusement.

"Oh, my dear chap, such things adjust themselves, you know! Come out for the evening, eh?" When Fontarge expressed surprise and reminded him that he had been seeking to borrow fifty francs somewhere that morning, he added: "I have two hundred and fifty francs. Believe this if you can—part of Beverloo's pay!"

"You got a loan from Beverloo?"

"Not exactly. It's a long story."

But it proved that Kaspar had gone too far on that occasion. A few days later he was summoned before the captain, and emerged from the officer's private quarters not quite as sure of himself as before. When Fontarge returned to the room, at five o'clock, the Russian squatted on his cot, smoking nervously.

"I'm in a jam, a serious jam, Paul. We must do something."

"What happened?"

"Never fool around with people who lack a sense of humor," Kaspar laughed in disgust. "I forgot that principle. Remember the other day when we needed some money, and I told you Beverloo

had supplied it? Well, it was such a funny stunt that any one else would have kept still. You remember that set of books at the Dolonieu's? Household encyclopedia, the housewife's friend? Some poor fool who tried to place books here left them as security for his bill, one night, and never called for them. Fine-looking books with green and gold covers, thick paper, and eleven hundred and fifteen photographic illustrations! Lucie, Madame Dolonieu, asked me to get rid of them. Beverloo's house is not a hundred yards from there, and I called in and showed Volume I, cooking, plain and pastry, Volume IV, dress-designing for the home. I sold her the lot in ten minutes, at half the original price.

"I didn't worry about a kick. Thought Beverloo wouldn't want to let every one know how stupid that fat wife of his can be. But he went to the captain, and set fire to the wick. The old man informs me that he kept complaints from going to regimental headquarters so far, but that unless I settled with Madame Beverloo, my tailor, and the café, and gave accounts on other debts inside three days, he'd forward all information to the colonel's office. You know what that means: Conduct unbecoming a sergeant, reduction to the ranks. We must do something."

"We?" Fontarge repeated.

"You're my friend, aren't you? Part of the debt is yours, in all justice. Do you think the Dolonieu's take promises? Friends are friends there, but business is business. I guarantee you."

"Seven hundred and eighty-nine francs, all told," Fontarge said. "All right, I'll raise that in forty-eight hours."

"I need forty-five hundred."

"You owe me over three thousand," Fontarge reminded him. "How you could get yourself so deep in six weeks beats me."

"That isn't the question, old man. I need forty-five hundred."

"I don't know where to get it, really."

"Your father has dough. Cable him—make it six thousand, won't you? Never hurts to have a bit of a margin."

"Can't do that." Fontarge shook his head. "Not that the sum is enormous for him, but I've never asked him for anything since I enlisted. He'll know that it's more than a sergeant should get into debt for in a legitimate fashion. That's out."

"*Sale petit bourgeois!*" Kaspar said, violently. "Dirty middle-class prig!"

"What's that?" Fontarge rose.

"That's out, that's out! He'll know it's more than you should be in debt for? Respectability, eh? How much does he think your damned carcass is worth? Gratitude, gratitude—your mouth was full of it. But where is it now, when I need something?"

Fontarge flushed. This was a hard argument to answer.

"After all, it was your duty—"

"My duty, maybe! But you're alive; every mouthful you eat you owe to me! Oh, I've noticed you pinching your pennies, hugging them. I do believe you'd give your blood for me. But money, respectability? Oh, no—" Kaspar paused, shook his head. "I pity guys like you! I'd sooner be crooked than small-minded and miserly. You'll think of this again."

Kaspar stepped to the wall, pulled his Star automatic pistol from the hanging holster. He loaded the weapon. This was not bluff. One thing must be conceded, that Kaspar had physical courage, and that through bravado, even more than despair, he might carry out his threat and blow his brains out.

"Hold it!" Fontarge urged, not moving, knowing that a quick movement might precipitate a tragedy.

Kaspar lowered the gun, his face streaming. But he was shaken only for a moment, relaxed and started to laugh.

"Hope you're never sorry you stopped

me!" He tossed the gun on the cot, after setting the safety. "It's never cute to play with fire-arms, is it?"

"Here's what I'll do: I'll write to my father and explain what happened, without embarrassing details. That you saved my hide and that you're in trouble. He'd investigate anyway, before cabling that much. Three days for the letter to get there, air-mailed from Casablanca—and another day for the cable. I'm sure he'll come across with the money. He was in the army himself, and had lots of scrapes."

"Sarrazin meant the day after tomorrow, and he isn't kidding," Kaspar shrugged. "He warned me privately a couple of times before. Wanted me to leave you alone. Tell your father by cable that you have a chance to invest, that it's a loan. For a month, at most. You see, that's the truth: I'm due for a cut on a new patent, I got Dolonieu to invest five thousand francs with a Russian friend in Paris who's marketing an invention."

Fontarge smiled faintly. It was evident that Kaspar was sincere. There are always cleverer grafters to graft on grafters.

"He'd ask me to give him the man's address and see him himself. I don't want to worry my family. You'll have to ask for a delay—"

"You know the captain." Kaspar shrugged. "That's as good as quitting me."

"Listen, I can let you have the money in time," Fontarge resumed after a long hesitation. "The inspector is coming tomorrow to look over my accounts. The quartermaster in Tazza let me know in advance, a service we do one another. As soon as he has checked up, I'll take a chance and let you have the surplus cash of the company. I'll replace it when my father sends the dough. It's not likely to be needed within this week."



FONTARGE perspired as he made the offer. While there was not much risk of discovery, still the captain might want to use some of the fund unexpectedly. And it was, technically and regardless of purpose and good intentions, a dishonest act; not to mince words, it was a theft! But if Kaspar could risk his life, Fontarge was duty-bound to take this chance.

He saw the Russian so startled that he hoped wildly, for a second, that he would refuse such a sacrifice.

"The company surplus?" Kaspar breathed.

"Yes. More than fifty-two hundred."

"And the treasury inspector is due tomorrow?"

"Yes, why?"

"*Nom de dieu!* What a mess!" Kaspar grumbled. He rose, slapped Fontarge on the back. "Listen, Paul, you're going to be in a jam—but keep your head. I've been in jams myself, and I'm still healthy. I told you Dolonieu supplied the money to send my friend, when as a matter of fact, he turned me down. It was such a good proposition that I took a chance, without consulting you so as not to worry you. You'll get half the profits. The surplus was in a big grayish envelope, wasn't it?"

"You mean you took my keys out of my pocket and opened the box?"

"Come, Paul, you know I must have to take that money!"

Fontarge was inert for long minutes, the world collapsing about him. Then he started to laugh nervously, until tears streaked his face. What an idiot he had been to sleep in the same room with Kaspar and leave handy a key that opened a strong-box!

And thus it was that a man wrecked his career, lost the chance at a commission, became a criminal—drifted into a tramp. A very simple process!

"Get yourself together," Kaspar urged, shaking him. "We'll get out of this some

way. Ten thousand will cover the whole. Don't fret, you won't go to prison. It's the captain's responsibility, so far as money is concerned. He'll give you time, when you tell him, truly enough, that it was stolen without your knowledge."

"And name you as the thief?"

"Nonsense, you don't need to know that. After all, a gentleman—"

Kaspar did not finish. Fontarge, lashed to fury, struck at him. And to his amazement, this magnificent fighter with rifle, bayonet and grenade, the man who endured Saharan thirst and fatigue, collapsed like a sack of grain from a punch on the jaw. He was out so completely that he slithered from the cot to the floor. His face rested one cheek against the rough matting.

For a long time, Fontarge looked down at the limp body, losing shape in the swiftly gathering night. Sarrazin had called him a man possessed of the devil, and he had been right. Kaspar left a trail of misfortunes everywhere he passed. Women and men, superiors, equals, subordinates, no one escaped. He moved through his world like a blight. It would be a good thing if Fontarge had broken his neck.

In the meanwhile, what was he to do? The captain must be told before the inspector came. Should Fontarge reveal everything? He could not very well do this: Kaspar had saved his life. No, he would give the facts that must be given, that was all. As for the rest—he smiled grimly—a gentleman understands!

On the floor, Kaspar stirred, took a deep, sighing breath.

Fontarge left the room, walked across the esplanade. In the distance, he could see the lighted windows of the officers' mess. Dinner had not started, Sarrazin must be at home. Fontarge gave his name to the orderly, who invited him in.

"With you in a minute; cigarettes on the table!" the captain called from the inner room. His friendly tone hurt Fontarge. In a short time, Sarrazin came

out, in undershirt, trousers and slippers, wiping his face. "I was shaving. Just a moment until I dry my hands."

"Captain!" the sound of the sergeant's voice startled the officer. "I must report to you immediately."

"Yes," Sarrazin's voice was flat. He had guessed.

"When the inspector comes tomorrow, the gray envelope containing the surplus cash, fifty-two-hundred and thirty-five francs, will be empty."

The captain tossed the towel aside.

"Sorry."

Fontarge had waited for an explosion of temper, reproaches, a scene. Sarrazin was mute. He was right, he was a man who accepted facts and did not deluge them in torrents of useless words. The money was gone, Fontarge was a thief, the captain had misjudged him, trusted him, and he was sorry. Now, he merely wanted the sergeant to leave.

"Here's the key to the strong-box, Captain."

"Leave it on the table."

"Inside a week, I shall receive funds to cover the loss. I give you my word of—" he stopped speaking as Sarrazin's cold smile cut him like a whip. "Well, the money—will be—here—" he waited a second, could not stand the silence and talked again, his phrases resounding, queer and lonely, like rain dripping on a window pane. "Captain—what shall I do? Return to my room or report at the prison?"

Sarrazin reached for the tobacco box, stopped.

"I shall replace the money tonight. I have a family and the sum is large for me. I am forced to accept your offer of a refund, which ends thought of prosecution."

"I am ready to pay for what I've done, Captain."

"I dare say," Sarrazin slipped into a tunic, strode the floor. "I understand what has happened, and why it comes out now, a direct result of another call I

had today. But you had a responsibility. You neglected it. You escape official punishment. But you'll understand I can neither countersign your nomination to the school nor grant you a transfer into another company as a sergeant. On the other hand, you can not remain here."

"No, Captain, I can not."

"You know the usual course?"

"To surrender my chevrons and renounce my assignment voluntarily. Yes, Captain."

"I shall authorize your immediate transfer as a Second-Class Legionnaire."

"Thank you, Captain."

Fontarge saluted, pivoted and reached the door.

"Legionnaire!" Sarrazin called. He waited until Fontarge came to attention before him. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-four, Captain."

"You have time before you. It will take courage and patience, but you are not ended. Even if your dishonor was public, there would be no need for desperate action." Fontarge listened silently: Sarrazin feared that he would commit suicide. "As long as your honor is intact in your own estimation, grit your teeth and fight. You have been a fool, perhaps a generous fool. I do not consider you a thief."

"Thank you, Captain."

"In a few months, in a few years, you will have a captain who will be able to slate you for a commission again. At that time, if I'm still—in Morocco—I shall be pleased."

The two looked at each other for a moment. Then, oddly, both smiled. Fontarge again saluted, pivoted and left.

Two days later, when the companies were assembled for roll-call, a non-commissioned officer read off the orders. He paused, took a breath, his eyes mechanically seeking Fontarge, and continued in his metallic voice:

"Order of the Regiment Number Seventy-Four. In General Orders of today's date, the General commanding the

Region of Fez has reduced to Second-Class Legionnaire Sergeant Fontarge, Paul, Number 15233, Second Company, Second Battalion, Second Regiment of Foreign Infantry, in accordance with his own request.

"Second-Class Legionnaire Fontarge will be incorporated in the Third Regiment, Tadla Battalion.

"The captain commanding the Second Company will report execution of this order, which takes effect from today's date."

Fontarge marched off with his section. And as they broke ranks, no one questioned him. They read between the lines: the visit of the inspector, the removal of the sergeant from the office. No matter what happened, Fontarge would always pay for his mistake.



OFTEN during the next two months Fontarge had occasion to notice the resemblance between his present situation and that of Kaspar when they had met first. To start with, he was joining a formation already in the field for some weeks; a glance at his military papers revealed that he had been a sergeant, until recently, and cast a shadow of doubt on his character. And, as had been the case with Kaspar, he was a corporal when he reported to the battalion.

The lieutenant in charge of the reinforcements was a squat little chap, not more than an inch over five feet tall, Ducaze. Fontarge suspected that Sarrazin had written him. In any event, he took a liking to the Legionnaire, and granted him chevrons very soon. Experience, the habit to command, are quickly discerned in a man by a veteran officer.

Fontarge was more elated at winning back those two green wool chevrons than he had been when awarded decorations or gold braid. They were a symbol that the ladder was still there for him to climb.

The Tadla Column had supplied hard work and hard fighting that season. The men of the Legion battalion were burnt almost black, sinewy, lean, tense. As was proper, they had drawn the toughest tasks during combat, and in the intervals had graded the trails for the artillery, created new roads, constructed block-houses. They were interested in nothing save the gossip of their camp, and showed only casual interest in the new arrivals.

"Liaison—" Captain Champdor said softly as he saw Fontarge.

Again, this was what had happened to Kaspar, Sarrazin had put him in his liaison group. It was normal, for demoted sergeants united several qualities needed for a good runner: Good physique, tested courage, education and a measure of intelligence. Moreover, they were eager to redeem themselves, and could be kept under observation, yet in a useful job.

Champdor was very tall and thin, a human stork, whose bristling tuft of reddish-blond hair rose like a bird's crest on his head. There was a rumor, probably untrue, that he had studied to be a priest. He never swore, did not drink and was studious. He was brave, exposed himself quite as freely as did Sarrazin, but without his fierce, cocky truculence. He did not defy danger, he ignored it.

Fontarge participated in some very pretty fights, engagements that started out to be as orderly and precise as a game of chess, and culminated in fierce, spasmodic shambles. The tribesmen fought well, and as the staff-officers phrased it *beaucoup de mordant*, much bite.

The company as a whole reflected its chief. Where Sarrazin's men were swashbuckling, hard-bitten mercenaries, Champdor's Legionnaires professed to be calm, patient soldiers. They died silently, and usefully. After one attack, Champdor removed his képi before seventeen of them, in a neat row, draped

with blankets, their booted feet protruding stiffly.

After that engagement, the column camped and awaited supplies and reinforcements. Fontarge was in charge of a hunting detail, and was out the greater part of each day. When he returned, one evening, the convoy had arrived. Corporal Vernar, who had been in the battalion at Dar-Makanbas, rushed to greet him. He was a Parisian serving as a Belgian, a talkative, curious fellow.

"How are you, Sergeant?" he shouted. "I don't mean sergeant as a crack, it just slipped out from habit. Don't worry about my spilling it around that you were in a jam. For one, I don't believe you took a thing. You could be trusted with dough like a dog with a cabbage. We're wise to the truth. Captain Sarrazin's orderly heard him talking, and told us one night when he was drunk. I mean the orderly, a German."

"Have another drink," Fontarge suggested, and asked, to show polite interest. "How do you happen to be here?"

"Me? Funny story—" Vernar drained his glass of wine, tilted the bottle. "They were going to reduce me to second-class, but the captain wouldn't have it. He said I had been bothered enough about the robbery without losing my chevrons—"

"What robbery?"

"That's right, you left the day before it happened. And you probably didn't read the papers. It was in all of them, in Meknes, Casablanca, Oran papers. The safe in the tax collection office was broken open, and the dough taken. Easy job, with a crow-bar. Over eight thousand francs and a whole lot of duty-stamps. The watchman saw somebody going out over the back wall, investigated and called the cops. They were around not ten minutes after the job was done.

"Well, you know that the Native Affairs Director lives down that same street, four houses down. His wife brought out her maid from France, and

our families used to be friends. I got friendly again, naturally. That night, I was supposed to be on guard, but another guy took my place and I went to see her. Her boss is sort of cranky, you know, the way women get before they surrender and become sweet old dames—and I couldn't go in at the door. So I used the rear wall.

"First thing we hear is a lot of tramping and yelling, somebody rapping on the garden door in front. I decide it's no place for me to be caught, because the girl might get the sack. So I kiss her good-by and hop over the wall.

"I land right on top of a ton of cop! He grabs a hold of me. You remember how sore Sarrazin is when the cops catch us. Wounds his pride. So I try to get away, and instead of going easy and trying to explain, the fat guy raps me on the bean with the butt of his gun. He thought I was the thief, but how could I guess that?

"I manage to break loose and he starts after me, so *bang!* Head first, right into his belly. You'd think I had harpooned a whale, the way he blew. Another cop runs up, and I kick him in the shin. Then they start to shoot, and that was my cue to vanish.

"As soon as I turn a couple of corners, and I wasn't picking posies on the way, either, I slow down and start laughing to myself. I just thought the cops were feeling very rough that night. I wasn't scared that they'd come and complain to the captain, because you know how he sends them away!

"This time, though, it's a different story. The whole battalion gets turned out, and the two cops go down the front of the sections. They spot me, all right! I had a big patch where one had socked me.

"That's the criminal," said the fat one.

"It is," the skinny cop agrees. "I'd know his sinister mug in ten thousand."

"Mind you, it was dark as pitch in

that street. The only way they knew they had to look for a Legionnaire was because one of my collar-tabs had been torn loose and picked up. They search my pack, find no money. And they wanted to push me around, but the captain wouldn't have it. Then my girl comes, having heard I was pinched, and gives me a perfect alibi. She didn't get fired, either, as I promised her boss to marry her as soon as I got out. I have three years to pull yet, so I don't worry.

"But the captain says he better transfer me, because of the cops I hit, who'd look for trouble every time they saw me in town. I said all right, and asked to be sent some place where there's fighting. It makes no difference, they do what they like with you anyway, and it sounds good."

Fontarge knew that there had been a man in town who needed money desperately at that time, and who did not hesitate to take it where it could be found.

"They got the thief?"

"Sure, they did." Vernar paused to drink, and Fontarge waited to hear Kaspar's name. But he was startled by what followed. "It was an employee right there, who fixed up things to look like an outside job. Nice-looking kid, Felix Prouvet by name, who earns maybe nine hundred a month and was hitting the high spots with some fancy dames in a house near the Mosque Sidi-Abdallah."

"Madame Dolonieu's?" Fontarge prompted.

"That's the one. Her place was searched as soon as he was pinched, and they found the duty-stamps in an umbrella-stand. Going to be tough for him, because he is under oath as a public servant. He tried to hang himself, but the dirty lice cut him down."

Fontarge recalled the pale, insignificant youth. Decidedly, every one connected in any fashion with Kaspar ended

tragically. Vernar continued as if to confirm his thought:

"Doloneu's kicked his women out and is getting a divorce. Seems he didn't know what went on when he was working outside town. The police ordered the dames out." Vernar opened a worn wallet, produced several clippings from newspapers. "I saved these. You can have them to read, but I want them back. My name is mentioned, you know."

"Thanks. What happened to Sergeant Kaspar?"

"There was some talk about his being in a jam because of creditors. But that couldn't have been the case, because he was transferred as a sergeant."

"Where to?"

"What? Didn't you know?" Vernar's eyes protruded. "He's here, right here! He commanded the draft all the way from Kasbah-Tadla. Have another drink—"



FONTARGE needed that drink badly. Of all persons he did not want to meet again—He was broke, a mere corporal lacking influence, and completely beneath Kaspar's notice. But he had a premonition that this would mean further tribulations. The Russian was not the man to forgive a punch in the jaw.

When he returned to his tent, a comrade informed him that a sergeant, a newcomer, had been asking for him. And before long Kaspar appeared.

"Let's go and have a drink," he suggested, even after Fontarge had avoided shaking hands.

"I've had enough, thanks," Fontarge said.

He was touched, however, that Kaspar should seek him out and try to be friendly. He must have felt a genuine affection.

"Still sore?"

"Forget it," Fontarge said.

"Well, I called you some nasty names," Kaspar granted. "But you socked me a good one. Never understood why you rushed off and cried on the captain's shoulder. I would have helped you to bluff it out. Remember that chap I told you about, in Paris? He came across by cable. I can let you have five hundred back on what I owe you—maybe seven-fifty." He pressed money into Fontarge's hand. "Take this on account. Let's pull together, and I'll get back your chevrons. Champdor's agreed to let me form a special group when the chance offers. I won't do you any favor, because you neither want nor need one. But I'll see that you get what you earn."

"Thanks," Frontage spoke with emotion. He had not been altogether a fool; this man was his friend, a sincere comrade. "Why did you transfer?"

"Remember that little clerk who used to court Marcelle Doloneu? He stole some dough from his office, and as he spent most of it in that joint, the women were kicked out. It was well known that I hung out there; I even had to answer questions from the cops, explain where I had got money. I got out from under. Watch me."

In a week, Kaspar was on good terms with Champdor. The captain knew the new sergeant's record, but as Kaspar spoke modern Greek and had some knowledge of the ancient classic tongue, which the officer loved, he made allowances. Very soon Fontarge had proof that the sergeant was boosting him, for he was asked to collect certain flowers growing in the vicinity. No one but Kaspar knew, in this outfit, that Fontarge was interested in botany.

While special talents do not influence promotion greatly, they at least cause a man to emerge from the obedient, mute, anonymous mass of a company.

When the column reached the tawny plain extending at the foot of the Jebel-Khang-el-Ghar, a row of stark, rocky hills stretching across the southern hori-

zon, Fontarge felt that he would retrieve his gold chevrons on the morrow. The French had to cross the range, and their passage would be bitterly contested, for when they penetrated to the valley behind which was the grazing ground of herds and flocks of the majority of the tribes fighting against them, it would be like piercing an enemy's heart and stomach. There would be opportunities for all who longed to distinguish themselves, from the commanding general down.

At dusk, when the last parties had returned along guarded paths to the camp from the water-holes, the Legion companies were assembled and told that "the battalion has been honored by a request of the commander-in-chief that it supply twenty volunteers for a special mission of great importance to the column." Sergeant Kaspar, of the battalion's liaison, would be in command and select those to go out of the applicants.

As good as his word, Kaspar pointed out Fontarge first of them all: "You—I need another corporal—"

"There's Vernar," Fontarge suggested, "from our old bunch. He gabs a lot, but he's a good man when things pop."

"You two are friends?" Kaspar asked sharply.

"Sure, Sergeant."

"Ah?" Kaspar darted a queer, piercing glance at Fontarge, then called: "Vernar, Corporal Vernar!"

The corporal had not volunteered, but said he was glad to go, so long as he was invited. Kaspar nodded, inspected the men already chosen by their non-coms as likely prospects. He had the instinct of a chief, Fontarge noted, for although he had been in the unit only a few days, he selected men with a reputation for daring among their immediate comrades and passed over several who wore imposing rows of medals.

"You—and you—eh, the big chap with the long nose back there, don't be timid, you're in on this."

He smiled and joked, vibrated with confidence and energy. When the detachment was picked, he doubled toward the officers, stood at attention, saluted:

"Ready, *mon commandant*!"

"I'll let you explain to your own men, Sergeant. No talk of the undertaking to outsiders, eh? There are ears all about us, as they used to say during the War."

"Understood, Major."

Kaspar marched the volunteers some distance along the parapet, gathered them in a huddle around him with a gesture. He outlined instructions rapidly, repeating some of his phrases in German: "No helmets, no packs. Képis or turbans. See that your boots are solid and the laces strong. Rifle or carbine, with bayonet, six grenades for each one. Full canteen, biscuit, chocolate—anything, food for one day. Corporals, you will obtain strong rope, several pieces about forty feet in length. Got it? Now, who's a real mountaineer?"

"Me, Sergeant. Hauslinger, Julius. I am guide long time back home."

"You'll go first. You see the peak that rises above the hills over there? By the time the column breaks camp, we must have started the climb. It is probably occupied, but whether it is or not, Legionnaires must be there by six o'clock. We turn out at three-thirty, so get a good sleep. And don't tell every one where we're going, or we may find that the local aldermen are holding a meeting on top when we arrive. Dismissed! Psst! Corporal Fontarge!" Kaspar grasped his friend's arm. "Nothing to this job, if we act quickly. Let's hope we have to fire a few shots to make it look good. That will mean chevrons for you. They haven't had time to squash your assignment, and you'll just have missed a semester."

"Sounds good, the way you put it, Sergeant."

"I may be cock-eyed outside, but I

know the ropes in the service. Shake on it?"

"Sure thing, Sergeant."

Kaspar grinned at the title used, and urged Fontarge away with a playful shove. The corporal joined Vernar and they went over to the engineering section to get ropes. It would have been simpler, easier to steal them than to sign vouchers. A sergeant behaved much as if each strand of hemp had been spun gold. Then they had to be present at the distribution of cartridges and grenades, make sure that the men were properly shod.

It was quite dark when Fontarge lighted a candle in the tent. His companions were at the traders'. He wrote a letter to his father, described the mission he was to undertake, and concluded: "I shall add a few lines when I return tomorrow night."

The old gentleman would understand what had happened if he received that letter without additional lines. He had been a soldier and would be satisfied without heroics or pathetic farewell. Then Fontarge emptied his pockets, collecting various small personal objects to be sent home in case of accident to him. After hesitating a moment, he kept a good-luck coin.

From a breast-pocket his hand brought forth a wad of paper, perhaps the size of a thick cigarette, worn and frayed. He was about to flick it aside, when he identified it as the clippings given him by Vernar, which he had promised to return. He smoothed them out on one knee, hunched closer to the light and read. He laughed over Vernar's epic encounter with the gendarmes. Then a rather long item in the *Meknes Echo* aroused his interest.

The Robbery of Dar-Makanbas: Our correspondent informs us that Felix Prouvet, employee of the tax department, was subjected to further questioning by the examining magistrate. After the tearful depression that drove him to attempt suicide, the unfortunate man has taken the pose of injured innocence and offers stubborn denials.

He confessed to having filched minor sums from time to time, covering them by alterations in his accounts. But he denies having committed the robbery. This attitude is incomprehensible, as the proofs against him are overwhelming.

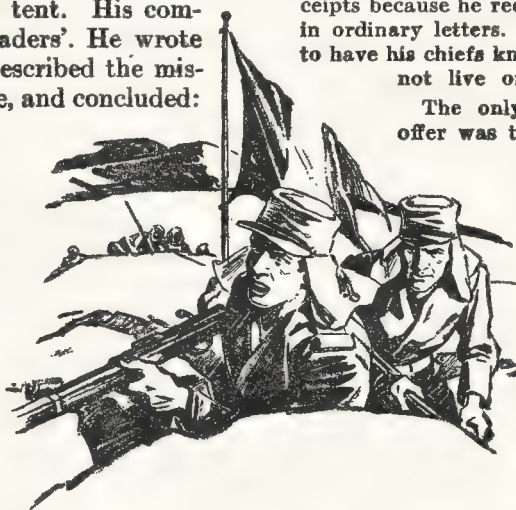
He admits that his expenses were larger than his salary, but claims that an aunt supplied him with additional money, and explains that he can not show receipts because he received it enclosed in ordinary letters. He did not wish to have his chiefs know that he could not live on his salary.

The only alibi he could offer was that he spent the entire evening and much of the night at the Dolonieu house. Testimony of the girl, Marcelle, indicates that he was out of sight, presumably ill or asleep, for several periods of from ten to thirty-five minutes, ample time to run the short

distance and set the stage for the pretended robbery.

He advances the opinion that had he been faking the theft, he would have fractured the locks on the doors. But the magistrate reminded him that he might have feared to attract the watchman's attention by an outside noise. Also, that keys were used on locks of special design, and that the two gentlemen who also have the proper keys have alibis and are beyond suspicion. He also failed to advance a sound theory as to how the duty-stamps were found where he had spent the night, if he had not hidden them there.

But we are informed that there is stronger proof, discovered by the corporal of mounted *gendarmerie* Clunet. This young policeman, who had studied



criminology in France as part of his training, found within the safe a small oval of platinum, on which were engraved the interlaced initials F.P., Felix Prouvet. This he easily identified as part of a cuff-link, probably torn off by a jagged edge of the smashed door of the safe as the funds were taken out. Policeman Clunet made a thorough search of the Dolonieu premises and found the mate to the link in a refuse-bucket.

Prouvet disclaimed ownership. The police of his home town have been notified and will seek to discover where he purchased them.

Fontarge shrugged. The jeweler who had made and engraved those cuff-links was established at No. 77, rue des Granges, and was still able to identify them, for Fontarge's father had written recently that he had won a prize for design with a model somewhat similar. While F.P. stood for Felix Prouvet according to the newspaper, P.F. stood for Paul Fontarge.

He had been very attached to those bits of jewelry. They had been given him by his mother, to wear with his first suit of evening dress at the Prefectoral Ball, soon after he had become bachelor of letters. Kaspar, who was attracted by fine work, had started to wear them without asking permission, and had evaded returning them two or three times, promising to care for them.

Without moving from the tent, Fontarge had solved the robbery and could clear Prouvet.

Kaspar had gone to the Dolonieu's to drink and to forget his troubles. There, he had met the young chap, as often before, and had listened to his routine boasting of how much confidence his superiors had in him. Some time during the evening, Prouvet, whom alcohol affected rapidly, had staggered into a bedroom to sleep. Kaspar had excused himself, on one pretext or another—formality was not the keynote of those gatherings—had taken the keys from the discarded clothing, and started out.

To a man trained for night raiding,

the undertaking was play. In fifteen minutes he had run over to the tax office, climbed the rear wall, broken the safe. The loss of the cuff-link had been accidental, had happened probably as the newspaper surmised. Kaspar had returned to Madame Dolonieu's house, and it was quite certain that no one knew whether he had been gone three or fifteen minutes. At a certain stage of the evening, hostesses and guests were half-drunk, deafened by the phonograph's blare, and had lost all notion of passing time.

Kaspar had discovered the loss of a cuff-link and tossed the other way. Fontarge was sure that he had not foreseen that Felix Prouvet would be accused and arrested. But he was equally sure that the sergeant had accepted the coincidence of initials and other presumed proofs with relief. Kaspar could feel no remorse; he was too self-centered.

The reading of the clipping dispelled Fontarge's last illusion. Kaspar had been friendly as a matter of policy, to learn first if Fontarge knew of the cuff-link and to prevent him from speaking. He had been visibly annoyed that Vernar and Fontarge were friendly, because Vernar knew of the robbery.

A new thought gripped Fontarge like a claw of ice: Kaspar was ruthless. Killing was a small matter for him. Fontarge was a menace—and had reason to watch himself!



THREE-THIRTY.

The twenty volunteers gathered in the darkness, beyond the wire. Captain Champdor was present, but shook hands quietly and did not speak much. He knew that some of these men held to the superstition that voiced good wishes act as a challenge to fate.

Kaspar took the lead and they marched across the plain rapidly, in single file. There was small risk of encountering prowlers now, as the snipers

who hovered close to the camp earlier in the night were making for the hills, to avoid being caught by the early cavalry patrols and sabered in the open. Fontarge felt that there was a good chance that they would take the enemy by surprise. Although Moroccans are fond of night attacks, their faulty organization, lack of discipline and responsibility, prevent them from guarding any position very carefully.

Day was breaking when Kaspar halted his men at the foot of the hills. Fontarge, looking straight up, could discern the jagged outline of the rock needle they were to occupy, looming blackly against the soft, incredible rose sky. The rise was almost sheer, the climb would be strenuous; but there appeared to be footholds everywhere, and the path was broken by several ledges on which to rest and take breath.

Hauslinger inspected the rugged ascent, grumbled that it was easy. He slung the Lebel carbine across his back, knotted the end of a rope around his waist. Kaspar, following him, could use it as a guide and, if necessary, as a support. Magazines were loaded, but the sergeant forbade the sliding of a cartridge into the chamber. To work the bolt took a second, while an accidental discharge would compromise the undertaking.

"Ready," Hauslinger said impatiently. And the climb started.

The light shed by the rose-flushed sky was not strong then, but there was enough to discern objects at a short distance, while every minute brought day nearer.

At the beginning, Fontarge could hear no sounds save the rasping of hobnails on stones, and the heavy, almost convulsive breathing of a man hoisting his weight higher. Then, with habit and the first fatigue, there came clickings and slight thumps, murmured warnings, muttered oaths, admonitions to the chap

ahead, the man below, to go easy or to speed up.

The ropes had to be employed twice, over protruding ledges that belied outward from the side of the cliff, no obstacle for a fine climber like Hauslinger, but forbidding, baffling to less powerful, less agile chaps.

Fontarge at first had sweated with terror at the idea of having to finish the climb under rifle fire. Before long, he realized that their position even then would not be desperate. Any one who fired down would have to lean over the edge and outline head and shoulders. If the natives elected to drop big stones upon the Legionnaires, they would have to expose themselves to aim them, or let them go at random. A thin file of men strung out, scattered on the flank of a steep hill, left much room for misses. The undertaking appeared murderous and was not.

The last few feet, however, would be a problem. But what was the need of worrying ahead of time?

Minutes passed.

Without signal, as if acting on the impulse of a single brain, the whole file would halt at the same time, the men bracing their backs against the wall of earth and rock. The sun was lifting over the horizon, and the universe was aflame. At another time, Fontarge might have admired the panorama. But perspiration drenched him, and his knees quivered with increasing nervousness.

"Rope, eh, the rope this way!"

A coil looped down from above, straightened, tensed. Heavy boots ground, accouterment clattered. Forty feet above Fontarge, Hauslinger had halted on a ledge and was indicating with a lifted arm that the natural platform atop the peak was not more than six or eight feet above his head. Kaspar gestured for him to wait, then turned to look at his followers.

His eyes rested on Fontarge, and he smiled. Whether imagination or reality,

the corporal was sure that if it were possible to do it without being seen, the sergeant would give him a push and settle his uneasiness then and there. He moved along the face of the cliff, another man took his place—and Fontarge, secured by a witness, grasped the outstretched hand of the non-com.

Before long, Hauslinger had been joined by seven men, all that could crowd safely on the ledge.

"No use waiting," Kaspar said, "I'll go first—"

Fontarge scanned his face in vain for a trace of nervousness, for a symptom of fear.

"All right—" Takaers said.

He was the tallest of the Legionnaires present, six feet two inches. Standing on his powerful shoulders, a man would be within hand reach of the top. He rested the bayoneted rifle against the rock, braced his feet on the ledge, leaned back and locked his hands into a stirrup of muscle and bone.

"Cartridge into the chamber, fire when needed," said Kaspar, who forgot nothing, not even a routine order.

He was about to go, when the calm was broken and confusion came. There was a flash of flame, a thunderous detonation, a whining drone that fled away, returned in an echo. Fontarge hugged the side, trembling—his ears split by another shot, fired even nearer. Hauslinger had returned the shot, with a chamois hunter's precision.

A dark shape flung by, vanished, thumped hard below, slithered ominously, fell, struck again—and again—and at each impact, Fontarge felt a contraction of his stomach muscles, gagged, as if he were about to be sick.

"There's probably one or two more waiting," Kaspar said. He looked at Fontarge attentively, and resumed: "As long as it's occupied, it will mean something to be the first up. Fontarge, I promised you the first opportunity to

distinguish yourself. It isn't an order, you know."

No, it was not an order, but it was a proposition that no man could refuse without shame. In the eyes of the Legionnaires, who knew his record, Kaspar did not have to prove courage. They knew that he was afraid of nothing, physically. And taking second turn here was not precisely ducking danger.

"All right," Fontarge agreed. He shook his head when Kaspar offered to hoist him: "Takaers is a little taller."

"Here!" Hauslinger was struck by a brilliant idea! "I'll send a calling card." He heaved a primed grenade onto the terrace above. Fontarge understood, scrambled onto Takaers' shoulders, rifle in his left hand, waited for the explosion, then lifted by the powerful hands of the big Legionnaire, got a grip with both arms on the ground above.

His worst experience came from the wind, which suddenly tore into his half-open mouth, distended his cheeks, fused up his nostrils. He understood why the detachment had not been discovered sooner by the sounds it made—the terrace was swept by gusts of air which could hardly be felt beneath it.

He slid forward on the rough surface, knelt and swept the open space with a quick glance. He saw only one man, emerging from behind a boulder after the grenade's explosion. The native had the sun across his eyes, and Fontarge fired first, piercing his belly. By the time he was on his feet and walking up to the fallen man, Kaspar was at his side.

The sergeant kicked the massive Chassepot rifle aside, bent over the hillman. "How many of your people around?"

"Count the leaves on the trees," the other retorted.

Kaspar finished him with a blow on the head. Then he turned to the Legionnaires. "Man the opposite side. They'll be coming."

Then he inspected the position, accom-

panied by Fontarge and Vernar. The top of the peak formed a natural belvedere, an observation platform jutting above the range of hills like a watch-turret on a castle wall. To the right and left on flanking hills much lower in altitude, men were stirring around fires, beyond effective rifle range. Southward spread a tumbling series of crests, ending in a streak of green in which was embroidered the silver and blue glitter of a distant river.

"Good seats for the show," Kaspar declared.

He ordered a green smoke signal lighted. Remote in the northern plain, the French camp made a regular pattern, which altered as they watched. Long files of troops oozed away from that dwindling center, like the immensely long and tenuous feelers of a queer, square insect.

"They'll have a couple of thirty-seven millimeter cannon up here by noon, you know, and the beggars will never hold for long."

Kaspar took a man who was standing in full sight by the back of the neck and threw him behind a boulder. "Tired of living? The two guys who were here were just night guards holding the job down while the bunch went below to light a fire where it wouldn't be seen. They've heard the shots, and—"

He broke off, laughed, as a whining twang lashed their ears and receded in the distance. His finger indicated a gleaming, fresh lead streak against the rough surface of the rock. Instinct or experience, Kaspar had *felt* that some one was aiming at the Legionnaire.



THAT FIRST shot brought others. There were many men concealed on the slope, and their fury at losing the position made them reckless with ammunition. There was the crackling of Lebel's mingling with deeper, sighing reports, and Fontarge commented on this.

"That's because they can get plenty of cartridges for Lebel's," Kaspar explained. "The other guns are modern also, for the most part, but they're using cartridges reloaded with powder of their own making. You can tell that surely by the smoke. Look!"

Fontarge saw puffs of smoke shred into wisps of gray.

The sun was growing hotter, and the flies had appeared. Kaspar ordered the corpse thrown down, on the natives' side. This brought more shots.

"Well," Kaspar commented cheerfully, "things are picking up. For both of us. I commanded this job, and the major can't forget it. There ~~was~~ just enough shooting to make it look hard. And you, Paul, you voluntarily took the lead at the most dangerous time. That's the way history is written!" He slapped the young corporal on the shoulder: "*Eh bien*, you incurable *bourgeois*, you'll have your precious respectability again! Say thanks, like a nice lad!"

"We have a better chance to talk privately here than we're likely to have for a long while," Fontarge retorted. "So I'd like to ask you a couple of questions. Would you have been sorry if I had been shot as I popped up, and gone down that cliff the quickest way?"

"My dear fellow!" Kaspar gasped.

"Another question: When you looked at me and smiled, down below, offering me your hand to climb up, did you intend to slip a bit, and twist my arm?"

"Really," Kaspar lighted a cigarette, shrugged. He walked over to the parapet of stones, peered down at the slope, as if to indicate that he had business on his mind, returned slowly: "You're badly unstrung, old chap. Why would I wish to kill you? For that blow on the jaw?" He laughed. "It caught me by surprise. Young and strong as you are, you could not do it again if I were watching myself."

"Perhaps not," Fontarge admitted. "And I wouldn't like to try. I still owe

you my life, always will. I hope some day to repay in kind."

"You may yet," Kaspar assured him, "one never can tell."

"It isn't likely," Fontarge insisted.

"Why not?"

"Because, in one way or another, we're due for a long separation."

"You'll transfer from the Legion?" Kaspar wondered.

"No. But you are likely to leave it."

"I am? In a couple of years, yes. But not immediately."

"I thought you had business in Dar-Makanbas."

"What business?"

"Do you intend to let that poor chap, Prouvet, get eight to ten years in Guiana, which means life with the subsequent reclusion, for something you did?"

"That I did? You mean you're accusing me of robbing the safe?"

"Didn't you?" Fontarge asked.

Kaspar did not answer immediately. He appeared absorbed, as if he were weighing his answer carefully. Then he shrugged. "Admitting that I did, what proof can you bring?"

"You know—the cuff-link. I can prove it's mine."

"Prouvet knew you well. You drank with him several times, you lost at cards, you had the same initials—a lawyer needs less than that to cast doubt on your statement that you gave them to me and not to him in payment for a bridge debt. What do you care so much about that pimply-faced little monkey?"

"My orderly, Stenay, asked me several times why I didn't get my links back from you, saying you were careless and would lose them. He knew they were a souvenir from my mother."

"And that's your gratitude for what I did?" Kaspar was shocked. "You wish me to go to Guiana for life?"

"Prouvet would, as he is a public employee. You'd get two years. I think that his entire life is worth two of your years. You know that when I was con-

cerned, I took the blame for you. But I have thought this over, Kaspar, and I can't let personal gratitude utterly kill my conscience. I hate to think of that little monkey sweating for a crime he didn't do."

Kaspar lighted another cigarette, snapped his fingers, grinned.

"Oh, I know what ails you, what you're sore at me for. You're hurt because some people think you a thief. Corporal Vernar—" he called. The Parisian left his post and strolled toward them, on the sheltered side of the platform: "Here's an ideal witness, a corporal. Vernar!"

"Sergeant?"

"I want you to listen carefully and not forget a word of what I am going to say. You can attest to it later. Corporal Fontarge, here present, was reduced to the ranks at his own request to escape prosecution for appropriating company funds of which he had charge. He didn't do it."

Vernar, who had grounded his rifle and stood at attention, nodded.

"Nobody thought he did, Sergeant."

"I roomed with him, and borrowed his key one night to open the office, the desk and the strong-box. I took the money in a gray envelope that bore the heading of the officers' club. At no time did Fontarge indicate that he was willing to have me do this. He was in absolute ignorance of the theft until I informed him. Understood?"

The corporal laughed. "I couldn't misunderstand that, Sergeant."

"You may go back to your post." Kaspar waited until he had resumed shooting, then addressed Fontarge. "There's your little mess all cleaned up. I'll be reduced again, and probably lose the credit for this job. Pass it to profit and loss. What really made you sore was your own downfall."

The sergeant held on to Fontarge's arm and dragged him along as he paced about.

"Furthermore, your gratitude chokes you, you don't like to owe your life to me. Well, I can ease you there, too—I'm frank, anyway. You were right, if I could have helped something to happen to you, I would have. Both times, you saw clearly. I was tempted to make you lose your hold, and I was hoping that you'd get your head blown off when you went up. Hauslinger spoiled that with his grenade. That drove the fool to cover, gave you a chance. That's why I enjoyed smashing his skull afterward."

"What are you going to do about Prouvet?"

"At that again? Forget it. He's deserved what he gets. He'll be fired for stealing small sums, anyway, and that kind never recover. A man overboard, that's all. But I won't admit cracking a safe; I can't." Kaspar gestured helplessly. "It's not the prison—I've been in before. Taking army funds is one thing, but I can't confess to a vulgar crime. Non, *c'est trop crapuleux!* A gentleman understands!"

He was so serious, so unaware of anything ludicrous in that statement, that Fontarge could not smile. He knew that Kaspar followed an odd code of his own, and that he could feel shame. Perhaps, what he was seeking to make clear was that he was a soldier, a good soldier, and could not bear to be tried by civilians.

"I can't admit it, and I won't," Kaspar said. "I'd sooner—" He tapped his holster: "You or me." Fontarge understood quite easily that he would prefer a charge of murder. The sergeant lowered his head, glared about like a trapped animal: "You're a sportsman, Paul—and you owe me consideration. Did you ever hear of the judgment of God?"

"A sort of duel?" Fontarge shook his head.

"No." Kaspar seemed to have found a condition, a solution to his plight. He indicated the highest boulder on the platform, facing the enemy: "Some of the

slobs are not more than two hundred meters away. . If I stand up there, for five minutes, won't it show that—whatever runs things—" he crossed himself—"has forgiven me, decided against Prouvet?"

"It's a mad idea."

"I'll be killed or pardoned."

"Let me explain," Fontarge said, "It's useless because—"

"You're a soldier, you understand—" Kaspar broke off and ran to the side of the platform. He sprang up, caught hold and hoisted himself to the top, where he crouched a moment, peering down at Fontarge, fumbling inside his coat. The corporal lifted his carbine, then felt foolish. The other's hand had come out, clutching a watch. Kaspar would time himself!

"Come down—he's crazy! Let him alone—Sergeant, Sergeant!"

Queer characters were not rare in the Legion, and Kaspar had a reputation. But this passed the allowed limit, and the men protested, with few exceptions. The firing in front had halted completely, and Fontarge could imagine the startled hillmen looking up at that tall silhouette against the sky, inviting their bullets.



VERNAR, who was technically second in command, being senior in promotion to Fontarge, started to climb, and fell back with a sharp cry, clutching at his arm. At the same time, his face started to bleed. The missile had gone through his limb, struck the stone and torn the flesh of one cheek.

"All right," he grumbled as one of the men unrolled bandages, "Let him get himself killed and see if I care! Hasn't the sense he was born with, that chump."

The detonations had resumed. The bullets were seeking Kaspar, erect on the boulder, twenty feet above the platform, several hundred feet above the battlefield. For the column had de-

ployed and was advancing within firing range. The Legionnaire on guard at the rear reported that the engine-section was on the way up, hoisting its guns.

A minute passed, and Kaspar was untouched. In a gesture of defiance, he clutched his képi and tossed it aside. His silky blond hair gleamed. Fontarge knew that he must hear the missiles go past his head, that his whole body must be controlled, to hide the instinctive cringing. But he stood there, watch in palm, smoking a cigarette, his legs braced apart, firm as if carved from granite.

"It's no use—" Fontarge called, "they know—"

Kaspar did not appear to hear. Lead chipped the rock at his feet, whistled up. Fontarge winced in sympathy—a slug, mashed and flattened by a first impact on stone, whirring crazily, makes a ghastly wound. Brave as he was, Kaspar must have nerves, and was undergoing torture.

He was paying, paying in his own way. Lesser men would prefer years in prison and dishonor, to these five minutes of waiting hell. Prouvet, for instance, would probably have chosen life imprisonment, for this was not like an execution, where a man is marched by guards to a selected spot, forced in front of rifles and slain, but a strain of three hundred dragging seconds, with the full freedom of movement to dodge to safety.

Kaspar must know it was a question of time before a hit was scored. And he was gambling against time and the accuracy of mountain marksmen, living years in a single minute. Fontarge shouted that it was useless, and moved forward. He did not know himself whether he would have gone up or not, and was spared the decision. Takaers halted him.

"He's crazy! Leave him alone!"

Hauslinger was for throwing up a rope and dragging him down. The suspense was hard to bear for those watching—

and to the one who made a target of himself, mad or not, the seconds must be eternity.

At last, Kaspar slid down, landed on all fours beside the men. He rose, looked ruefully at the watch he held. The crystal had been broken. He asked for a drink, and a half-dozen canteens were held out. The strain appeared to have carved his face, to have brought the bones nearer to the skin.

"Five minutes!" he said. "Five minutes." He laughed jerkily: "But I almost beat the time—I feel sort of sick—" The sergeant led Fontarge aside: "You see, it isn't to be. You can't turn me in. You can't do that—"

Fontarge looked at him, and sensed again the astonishing knowledge of human nature that Kaspar held: Ridiculous or not, the bravery of the stunt had killed resentment in him. Kaspar was a soldier, and he was a soldier. Prouvet had sunk back into his place, a meek, unworthy little clerk. A creature of the outside world! It would be impossible for Fontarge, now, to start this man toward prison. But it was too late.

"Kaspar—I wrote my father last night—and spoke to Lieutenant Ducaze. I was afraid I would be killed, you remember. I'm sorry—but it's justice—"

Kaspar looked at him, lifted the canteen and took another drink.

"I understand," he said. "There's an end to everything. No grudge, old chap."

He moved so quickly that if he had aimed at him, Fontarge could not have moved aside. Kaspar had shot himself, Legion style, through the roof of the mouth, pressed the trigger when the muzzle of the automatic was between his teeth.

Fontarge looked down at him, his cheeks wet. Vernar, feeling gingerly of his bandaged neck, strolled forward, shrugged. He concluded:

"Posthumous citation. Too bad!"



A Novelette—

BEDROCK'S PARTNER

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

ONCE A WEEK Young Hardesty swept out the saloon. It was his job, along with acting as errand boy and general roustabout for the Bowdry bar. Young Hardesty was thirteen years old. In overalls which he had to roll up so he could walk, and a man's shirt with the sleeves cut off to fit a thirteen-year-old size, he plied his broom vigorously.

Beyond the doorway the desert sand palpitated with pale gold. It was too early for patrons of the bar. Young Hardesty had the place to himself. Scraps of paper, cigar butts, dust and filth moved before his broom. Sometimes when sweeping out he would find a two-bit piece—the only money he ever earned.

His swarthy face, uncut hair and over-size clothing gave him a wild, bewildered look. He was barefooted. Occasionally one of his played-out suspenders slipped off his shoulder. His first job was to sweep, then get a bucket of water and mop off the floor. His sweeping, while vigorous, was careful, not because he liked it. A fellow might overlook a piece of silver. That would be a calamity.

Moving one of the wall tables where men from the mines drank and played poker, Young Hardesty discovered a five-dollar gold piece. It was new—a work of art, beautiful, and as potent as a six-shooter. According to the unwritten law of the camp, it was his. He stood gloating over the new coin. Finders, keepers.

Taggart, who lived on whisky and his reputation as a bad-man, barged through the doorway. The lad tried to stuff the gold piece into his overall pocket. But Taggart caught his arm, took the coin from him.

"Too much money for you. Here." He thrust a two-bit piece at the boy.

Young Hardesty struck the silver to the floor.

"Give me back my money!"

"Your money," guffawed Taggart. "Hell, I lost that five last night when I was playin' stud with Long Jack and Bill Hemper."

"You're a liar! You weren't in here last night."

Taggart's sour mood was made no sweeter when Young Hardesty hit him in the shins with the broom. Deliberately Taggart stamped his heel on the boy's bare foot. Young Hardesty dropped to the floor and sat holding his foot in both hands. He howled, more because of anger and helplessness than because of the pain. Taggart stood laughing at him.

A rough, dusty individual in jeans, rowdy and boots stepped into the bar-room. His glance settled on Taggart, dropped to the boy on the floor.

"What's the matter, son?"

"That," Young Hardesty made use of a popular designation, "took my money."

The stranger's gray eyes questioned Taggart.

"He tromped on my foot, too," wailed the boy.

For reasons best known to himself, Tonto Charley did not wish to become involved in an argument. He was in a strange town. Several miles back on the desert his horse lay dead. Eventually the-reasons-best-known-to-himself would discover the dead horse. They were mounted. Tonto Charley glanced at the boy's injured foot. The tops of the toes were skinned and bleeding.

"How much money did he take, son?"

"Five dollars. I found it under the

table there. The boss lets me keep all I find when I sweep out."

Tonto Charley's gray eyes were still fixed on Taggart. "Shucks! He's just foolin'. He'll give it back to you."

The bad man of Bowdry couldn't afford to let this stranger run a whizzer on him.

"Who says so?"

"Why, I reckon I said so. Get up, son. Quit your bellerin'. If a horse was to stomp your foot you wouldn't beller like that."

"He done it on purpose."

Taggart surveyed the big stranger from head to foot.

"Maybe you're lookin' to get stepped on, likewise?"

Tonto Charley had learned all he wanted to know. Obviously the boy spoke the truth. Before the man could back up and pull his gun, Tonto Charley strode forward and cuffed him down. Taggart came up shooting. Young Hardesty ducked under a table. The big stranger was backing toward the doorway, firing deliberately, carefully. The dust in the room began to smell of burnt powder. Taggart lay on the floor, one arm outstretched. Young Hardesty crept from beneath the table. The stranger was gone. Vaguely the boy recalled a "So long, son." He rushed to the doorway. Down the street the stranger was mounting a cow pony.

Awakened at such an unseasonable hour, the town of Bowdry grumbled. It was altogether too early for a shooting. Bad-Man Taggart had got his, at last. He had it coming. Nobody mourned. Young Hardesty told his story, in which Tonto Charley, tall, broad of shoulder, with gray eyes, appeared as a small, thin man with a black mustache. The boy knew better than to describe the stranger accurately, not because Taggart had been killed, but because the stranger had borrowed a cow pony. That could hardly be overlooked.

A search of Taggart's body disclosed

some keys, a bandanna handkerchief, a six-shooter, some small change, and a new five-dollar gold piece. Young Hardesty claimed the five dollars, told how he had found it, and what had followed. He didn't get the money. His tale was too fantastic. Considered a hard case, his reputation grew even harder. He would claim five dollars that belonged to a dead man.



THAT WAS on Monday morning. Early Tuesday morning, garbed as usual, with the addition of a pair of cast-off boots and an old canteen, Young Hardesty was heading south across the desert on foot. Cuffing and cursing he could stand. But the injustice of being done out of his five dollars was the last straw. Doggone if he wouldn't starve before he would go back to Bowdry. He had told no one of his intent to leave. He would simply disappear. Nobody would take the trouble to look for him. Bowdry was not interested in strays, or folks without money. The town would feel it had done enough for the Hardesty family in burying Young Hardesty's father, who had died, two years ago, in a fit of delirium tremens. Since then Young Hardesty had shifted for himself. Now he was his own man. No more saloons to sweep out. No more night errands to the tents and board shacks. No more cursing and cuffing. If only he had a horse, and a gun, and boots and a Stetson like the big stranger had worn. The big stranger was a real man.

As he plodded south Young Hardesty kept near the Argus range. As long as he kept the mountains in sight he couldn't get lost. Where he was going and what he would do were problems to be worried about later.

In spite of his resolution and his familiarity with the desert, a few hours of journeying alone—with scant rations in an old gunny sack and not too much

water—enlarged the desert horizon to such an extent that he began to feel mighty small and unimportant. It had been different when his father was alive. While shiftless and happy-go-lucky in town, Old Man Hardesty had had all the old-time prospector's respect for the desert, knew it like a book, and was mighty good company when traveling.

Young Hardesty's shoes, much too large for him, rocked when he walked. Sand filtered in, along with tiny pebbles. Yet he plodded on, his shoes scrunching in the sand, the canteen bumping his back, the sack of food rubbing his shoulder. What he wanted to rub shoulders with was a real foothill, or a big rock, or a tree. They were solid, friendly like. Heat-haze and space, with a skyline that kept cheating you by moving ahead as fast as you did, were not friendly. Out on the flat you didn't get anywhere.

Young Hardesty angled toward the foothills. You find water in the foothills some times, and there is something to put your back against. Midday halted him at the mouth of a broad arroyo. Farther up the arroyo was a little shade. After consuming a whole can of salmon and some crackers, he settled himself for a siesta. But the country was so interesting he prowled along the bank of the arroyo. Black sand showed in the dry river bed. There might be mineral farther up.

For the time being he forgot his circumstances, and became a prospector, like his father. At ten he had twirled a pan. Often he had helped clean the riffles in the sluice boxes. He knew the stuff when he saw it. There was no hurry about starting on his journey again. A curiously shaped mound of sand on the south rim of the arroyo attracted him. "Looks like a grave, by golly!" He did not know that he had spoken aloud. The twisted sole of an old boot came to light, wooden pegs showing like rows of tiny teeth. Young Hardesty dug a little deeper, then quit

suddenly. Someone had been buried there a long time ago.

Farther up the arroyo he found a rusted pick without a handle. Still farther along he discovered a small heap of stone monumenting the corner of an abandoned claim. He uncovered a tin can. In it was a scribbled location notice. At last he came upon the mouth of a mine tunnel so overgrown with brush that he would have missed it entirely had he not had his father's eyes. Sliding earth and stone had left but a tiny opening. He knew it was risky, but he crawled in. A few yards back of the opening the tunnel was timbered. He could stand comfortably.

He was about to start out again when along the foothills came a man riding hard. From behind a ridge Young Hardesty watched. A horse couldn't stand that clip long. Nobody rode like that unless he was crazy. The man was reeling in the saddle like a cowboy on a spree. Once, as he drew nearer, the horseman looked behind him. Young Hardesty could see nothing on the back trail but heat haze and sand. As he approached the mouth of the arroyo the horseman slowed down. Young Hardesty held his breath. He knew the pony, stolen yesterday morning from a hitch-rail in Bowdry. The man who rode him was the big man who had shot Taggart. The big man seemed to be in trouble. His right arm hung down helpless. His face was dust gray. Young Hardesty stood up.

"Hey, there! Don't shoot. It's me."

Tonto Charley didn't seem surprised as he gazed at the ragged figure on the ridge. He climbed down.

"Where you headed?" Young Hardesty asked, his eyes on the torn sleeve, the shattered arm.

"Got any water?"

"Here you are. And say, there's a old tunnel up there. Nobody can find it but me."

"Old tunnel?" Tonto Charley seemed

to be talking to himself. "I guess they'll get me this journey."

"Get you? No! Step off your horse and come on. I'll show you."

Like a man in a dream Tonto Charley dismounted, swayed, stared at the swarthy, active youngster. Young Hardesty began to feel big and important. He shook the provisions out of the gunny sack.

"Here, step on this sack. Now wait. You got boots on. Now step on my old hat. They can't track you if you travel like this."

From sack to hat and from hat to sack the wounded man made his way up the rocky hillside. At the mouth of the shaft he stopped and leaned heavily on Young Hardesty.

"Crawl in," said Young Hardesty. "But give me your hat first. You take mine."

Tonto Charley's dull, heavy eyes grew momentarily brighter.

"What's the idea?"

"I'm goin' to give them fellas a run. They won't do nothin' to me if they catch me."

"What fellows?"

"Why the fellas that are chasin' you. You ain't ridin' your horse to death just so you can step off and walk the rest of the way."

"It's a chicken-skin chance," muttered Tonto Charley as he crawled into the tunnel. "So long, son."

The big man would need water. For a second Young Hardesty hesitated, then shoved his canteen into the tunnel.

As for himself, he figured he could find water, especially horseback. He wanted to light out immediately. But if he started before the pursuers were in sight, they would stop at the mouth of the arroyo and read sign. If they saw the man they were after mounted and still going, naturally they would follow. Young Hardesty felt himself a grown man with heavy responsibilities. How many were after the big man, and what

had he done? Shot Taggart, but no one would chase him for that. Borrowed a pony. Perhaps that was it. There were dark spots on the saddle, one of them not yet dry.

Spurring hard, a group of riders swung round a distant shoulder of the foothills. Pulling Tonto Charley's big hat down over his ears, Young Hardesty dug his heels into the pony's ribs. He must not let the posse get near enough to distinguish him. The pony, now carrying a much lighter burden, seemed to take on new life. Head bent and reins loose, the boy let him run. Glancing back, he saw that the posse had passed the mouth of the arroyo. He had accomplished that much. If he could tease them along till something happened, till he got somewhere . . .

His enthusiasm began to cool as he reasoned that a rifle bullet might take him in the back. As the wind whistled in his ears, Young Hardesty recalled a saying of his father's, "You got to take some chances, even when you're doing right. When you're doing wrong you got to take all of 'em." Was he doing right or wrong? It didn't matter. The big man had tried to befriend him.



IN SPITE OF the thrill and excitement of riding as a real outlaw—the big man back there in the tunnel was surely an outlaw or a posse wouldn't be chasing him—it was a scared boy that sat the swiftly moving pony boring south down along the foothills. The scared boy took to glancing back frequently. He was distancing his pursuers, but they still came on persistently, like a pack of dogs after a coyote. The rhythm of the pony's pace, the wind whistling past, the swing and lift of the desert, which seemed like a great treadmill sweeping beneath him, teased him into a sort of stupor. He wasn't getting anywhere. The earth was simply sliding along behind, his pony loping in one spot. Crossing a patch of heavy gravel

the horse stumbled. Young Hardesty came to with a jolt. In spite of his light burden the pony was tiring. To add to Young Hardesty's tribulation, one of his shoes slipped through the big ox-bow stirrup. In trying to free his foot, he tugged so hard the shoe came off. He pulled up, rode back and recovered it. It wouldn't do to let the posse find that shoe. The man they were after wore high-heeled boots.

The black specks which were following had become distinguishable shapes. Young Hardesty set his teeth and leaned well forward to give the horse every chance. Another mile at a heavy lope and the horse again stumbled. A distant, faint pop, and a slug whistling past, made him set his heels into the horse's ribs. Gallantly the pony answered, striking into a lope that was killing him.

Crossing a tongue of lava, thinly covered with sand, the pony slipped, stumbled, and turned completely over. Young Hardesty felt himself hurled into space. Something struck him on the head. He slid down into a tumbling darkness.

When he again saw the white light of the desert, his hair was wet, and the front of his shirt. He lay on his back with a roll of something soft under his head. Round about he saw the legs of horses, and men's legs. A man with blue eyes strangely bright in a deeply tanned face nodded to him.

"How do you feel?"

"Feel fine. Got tired of ridin', so I bushed down for a spell."

"Where's your pardner?"

Young Hardesty moved his head. "Ain't got no pardner."

The man with the dark face and strange blue eyes smiled grimly. "Game," he said to his fellows. "Old Man Hardesty's boy. Been missing from Bowdry since yesterday."

Young Hardesty sat up. Horses' legs and men's legs moved round in a queer dance. The dizziness cleared. He got to his feet. "Where's my horse?"

The man with the strange blue eyes laughed outright. "Say, kid, just where did you get that horse?"

Young Hardesty felt that he would have to step mighty careful. "Got him in Bowdry. He used to belong to Jim Turner. Me and Jim is friends."

The posse glanced at one another. The kid wasn't scared a little bit. And he was a hard nut to crack. Thickset, broad of shoulder, with a square, hard face, Deputy Winton stepped up to Young Hardesty.

"Quit fooling and talk up, kid. We're in a hurry."

Young Hardesty thrust out his chin. "So am I. If you're servin' papers on me, go ahead and serve 'em. Bet you two-bits you ain't got no papers for me. Anyhow," Young Hardesty shrugged, gesturing toward the man with the strange blue eyes, "he's the boss. I'm talkin' to him."

Chief Deputy Wright's eyes narrowed. "Come on, kid, let's have the straight of it. Where did you get that horse?"

"I told you."

"Try again."

"I'll tell you straight if you'll give me my horse and turn me loose."

The chief deputy agreed so promptly that Young Hardesty was put to it to manufacture another story. But he had knocked about the desert with his father. He knew places, locations, names, distances. He chose a far distant spot for the scene of his new story. "Know where Indian Wells is?"

Deputy Wright nodded.

"I was lyin' to you when I said I rode that cayuse out of Bowdry. I left Bowdry afoot. When I got to Indian Wells, there was a fella there, sittin' on the ground. Kind of a big fella with gray eyes. He looked sick. Seems he'd got shot up somehow. His pony was standin' near the Wells, his head low like he was used up. He asked me where I come from and where I was goin'. I told him I came from Bowdry and was headin'

south. He asked me for some grub, and I gave him some. He wanted to know if I'd seen a bunch of fellas ridin' the desert since I left Bowdry. I told him no. Then he said, 'Mebby I can make it.' He got up, filled his canteen, and then said, kinda like he just remembered, 'You can have the horse, kid. He's played out, so you'll have to take it slow.' Young Hardesty's gaze fell on Tonto Charley's big gray Stetson. He had forgotten the hat. Coolly he picked it up. "Just before he headed for the bad-lands, the big fella says to me, 'How'll you trade hats?' Young Hardesty looked Deputy Wright straight in the eye. "So I gave him mine and he gave me his."

"He headed for the bad-lands, on foot?"

Young Hardesty nodded.

"We missed a bet when we didn't take a look at Indian Wells," said Deputy Winton.

The chief deputy was taking nothing for granted. "You say you rode the horse from Indian Wells down the range to where we are?"

"Sure. The horse and me are here, ain't we?"

"Then where did you first sight us, and what did you do?"

Young Hardesty hadn't expected this. But he was talking for his friend back there in the mine tunnel. If he made a bobble he might as well make a good one. "Do? I just naturally stepped down off my horse and took up the cinch. It was at Point of Rocks." The boy's mouth drew tight as he waited to hear the posse tell him they had caught him on the wrong side of the fence this time. But as it happened, the posse had sighted Tonto Charley at Point of Rocks, and had seen him step off his horse before he set out at a fast lope. The members of the posse now got ready to set out again. Young Hardesty felt that for the time being he had thrown them off the track.

Deputy Winton turned to his chief. "Mebby we better take the kid along."

Wright shook his head. "Not if we're going over into the bad-lands." The chief deputy was again questioning the boy. "Did you step off your horse anywhere after you left Point of Rocks?"

Young Hardesty's back grew chill. They must have seen his tracks at the mouth of the big arroyo. This time he would have to tell a straight story. "Sure. I stepped off my horse at the mouth of the big arroyo back yonder and set down and ate some grub. Then I seen you fellas comin', so I lit out."

"Riding a tired horse pretty fast, eh?"

"Sure. I was scared."

The posse mounted and began to move off. Young Hardesty felt big and important again. They were angling away from the foothills—heading toward the bad-lands. Taking up the reins of his pony, he was about to climb into the saddle when the chief deputy turned back.

"Kid," he said in a kindly tone, "hadn't you better head back to Bowdry?"

"Nope. Them folks done me dirt."

"Where are you going?"

"Prospectin'."

"And no canteen?"

Young Hardesty had forgotten about the canteen. Even a greenhorn would not start for the desert without a canteen.

"Sure I had a canteen. Gave it to that fella—at Indian Wells."

"Sure about that?"

"Strike me dead—he's got it."

Young Hardesty was surprised when Deputy Wright smiled pleasantly. "It's pretty hard to tell the truth sometimes, isn't it?"

Heretofore Young Hardesty had imagined all peace officers mean, and quick on the trigger. This one talked and acted like a white man. He wanted to say he had been lying. But a mental picture of Tonto Charley dragging himself

into the tunnel squelched the impulse. The posse didn't need help. The big man in the tunnel did.

"Stick to the foothills. You'll strike Benson about six miles further down. And don't forget that's a stolen horse you're riding," Wright called over his shoulder.

The cow pony could barely make it at a walk, so Young Hardesty led him. All the pony needed was some grass and a good rest. Of course if the pony had been up and coming, those peace officers would have taken him along. But they couldn't bother with a played-out horse.



YOUNG Hardesty was plodding slowly along the Argus foothills, patiently leading the worn-out pony, when down from a narrow hill trail came an old man with a mouse-gray pack burro. The pack saddle was empty, save for a rifle and a canteen. He was a big man, with a long, white beard and queer, short-sighted eyes, an old-time prospector. For the first time since he had left Bowdry, Young Hardesty began to feel at home on the desert. The old man stopped and peered. Somehow those queer, short-sighted eyes were disconcerting.

"This here horse," blurted Young Hardesty, "I found him back yonder played out. So I fetched him along."

"Why, you're just a boy! Seeing your hat, first off I judged you was a man."

"A fella give me that hat. He was bigger than me."

"I reckon he must have been. Any objections to my asking you where you are going?"

"Prospectin'. My dad was a prospector. He made the first strike in Bowdry."

"Then your name must be Hardesty." The old man turned to his burro. "Misery, this is Old Man Hardesty's boy. What he's doing so far from home ain't none of our business. What are we going to do about it?"

"I'm prospectin'," reiterated Young

Hardesty. "Course, if I could get a regular job, I wouldn't throw it over my shoulder."

"You don't just fancy working for your father, eh?"

"My dad, he's dead. Two years ago, it was."

The old man shook his head. "I hadn't heard about that. So you're prospecting? I reckon it runs in the blood. Wasn't anybody looking after you in Bowdry?"

"Nobody but me. I got kind of tired of Bowdry, so I lit out."

Again the old man addressed his burro. "Misery, this boy boy says he don't like Bowdry, and we know Bowdry is a mighty sinful town. It's no place for a grown-up, to say nothing of a boy. What are we going to do about it?"

The mouse-gray burro lifted its head and brayed. The old man smiled. "Misery says yes. That means, son, you're going along with us, for a spell. What say if we go prospecting—for a little grub?"

"I'd sure like to. But you see, I—I—got a pardner."

"Oh, your pony will be all right after he gets rested up."

Young Hardesty felt that it was now or never. The old man was his kind. You could tell him things and he would understand. "It ain't my horse. I got another pardner. He got hurt. Mebby you could lend me a hand. He's hurt bad."

"Where is he?"

Young Hardesty gestured. "Back yonder."

The old man was on his way to Benson for mine supplies. The boy, alone on the desert, the played-out horse, the injured partner, awakened curiosity that verged on suspicion.

"You'll excuse us," said Bedrock, "if we hold a meeting and take a vote." He turned to his burro. "Misery, you heard this boy's story. You can see the played-out horse, and the saddle with stirrups too long for anybody but a grown man. Now I don't say that this boy ain't tell-

ing the truth. But I'm asking you, Misery, do you reckon the pardner that got hurt was riding this pony when it happened? I don't say he was. I'm just asking you."

The burro raised its head and brayed mournfully.

"Notice the difference?" said Bedrock. "When Misery brays mournful, it means he ain't just satisfied with things. Mebby you could help out by telling us a leetle more."

Something in the old man's manner touched the boy. He bit his lip, staring at the burro and the old man, through a haze of tears. Young Hardesty had tried to act like a grown man through it all, and the job had been a trifle heavy for him.

"Dam' it!" he sobbed. "Cross your heart you won't tell no peace officers?"

"Why, I guess I can get along without talking to any peace officers. How did your pardner come to get shot?"

"Nobody said he got shot."

"I know you didn't, son. But I reckon you wanted to. Go ahead and tell us. Me and Misery are right forgiving by nature. And we ain't what you'd call mean. Your pardner is in trouble. What can we do to get him out of it?"

"Well," Young Hardesty's tone was that of one who talks as man to man, "seein' we're both prospectors, I'll tell you. My pardner is back yonder in the big arroyo. He's hurt bad. I hid him in that old mine tunnel so the posse couldn't find him. I lit out on his horse, and the posse lit out after me. My horse stumbled and throwed me. When I come to, the posse was askin' me questions. After a spell they turned me loose, and lit out for Indian Wells."

"Course you lied to 'em."

"Some, mebby. But I ain't lyin' to you." Young Hardesty retold the happenings since he had found the five dollars in the Bowdry saloon, still, however, describing Tonto Charley as a small, thin man with a black mustache.

Somehow he could not refrain from including that touch.

Bedrock glanced up at the sun. "We won't go to Benson today. We'll go see your pardner. Wish I'd fetched along a couple of blankets."

Arriving at the mouth of the big arroyo, Bedrock took his Winchester from the pack saddle and carried it in the hollow of his arm. Young Hardesty's admiration ran high. The old man was kind and gentle, but by gum he was all hooked up for trouble, just in case somebody was milling around the arroyo that shouldn't be there.



TONTO
Charley was in a bad way.

Fever from his wound had set in, followed by delirium. The canteen lay flat on the floor of the mine tunnel, empty. He was hoarsely murmuring names and places unknown to Bedrock and Young Hardesty.

"We'll have to get him out in the light," declared Bedrock. "Son, you take his canteen and run along up to the head of the arroyo. There's water there. We'll need a plenty."

When Young Hardesty returned, Bedrock got busy with his knife. Young Hardesty gritted his teeth and watched. Occasionally he had to help. Tonto Charley offered no conscious resistance, but his fever made him restless. Striking the bone, the bullet had angled into the big muscles of his upper arm. When it was removed, and the arm rough-splinted and bandaged, Tonto Charley was lifted and carried back into the tunnel, where

he lay groaning. Bedrock came out and stood gazing across the desert.

"When we goin' to take him out of here?" asked Young Hardesty anxiously.

"He can't travel now, son. Mebby in three, four days."

In less time than that the posse would have discovered that neither he nor the man they were after had been near Indian Wells. They would head back for the Argus range. The arroyo was now so tracked up the posse would have no difficulty locating the mine tunnel.

Young Hardesty's troubled face was not hard to read.

"They'll be back," said Bedrock, as if the boy had spoken his thoughts. "I reckon it's our job to circumnavigate 'em?"

Young Hardesty didn't know what the word circumnavigate meant, but it had a very powerful sound.

"You mean fancy shootin', from behind a rock, or something?"

"No, son. We can do better than that."

"You mean mebby we can fool 'em?"

"If we have to. But I aim to let them fool themselves."

Young Hardesty was curious. Bedrock had lighted his pipe and was seated near the mouth of the tunnel. He smoked and said nothing for perhaps five minutes. Finally Bedrock rose.

"Me and Misery will be going to Benson. We ought to be back long about midnight. Got enough grub in your sack to last out?"

"Plenty, for a couple of days."

Bedrock, with his burro, started down



the arroyo. Young Hardesty sat watching him. The old man had said he would come back. Would he? Young Hardesty noted that his pony was dragging the reins up the arroyo, looking for grass and water. He let him go.

His back to the mine tunnel, watching the evening shadows blanket the desert below, he sat waiting for Bedrock. He jumped when he heard a voice behind him—Tonto Charley asking for water. He raised the wounded man's head, gave him water, carefully restoppered the canteen.

"Is that you, kid?" Tonto Charley's voice was weak, but clear.

"Sure, it's me. Did you figure I'd run out on you?"

"Didn't figure anything. What's the best bet?"

"Keepin' still, Bedrock says. In mebbey three or four days—"

"Who is Bedrock?"

"My minin' pardner. He says you got to lay quiet for a spell."

Tonto Charley said nothing. Peering at him in the shadowy tunnel, Young Hardesty saw that he had gone to sleep. Cautiously he drew Tonto's gun from the holster and marched out of the tunnel. He was guarding a wounded man, an outlaw. If the posse showed up he would—well, he wouldn't shoot them. He didn't want to hit Deputy Wright, but he would fire a shot over their heads, just to throw a scare into them.

Tired and hungry, Young Hardesty opened a can of corned beef, ate it and almost immediately fell a sleep. He lay curled in front of the tunnel, the six shooter in his hand. And there about midnight Bedrock roused him.

"It's all right, son. What you doing with that gun?"

"Guardin' him."

"That's fine. But suppose we put the gun where it belongs. You might have wakened sudden and shot Misery."

Misery, beyond whose shoulder shone

a slip of a moon, looked like two Miserys, so laden was he. The boy helped Bedrock unload a new dutch oven, coffee pot, skillet, tin plates and cups, flour, bacon and beans. Bedrock had even purchased a cheap new blanket and a gold pan. Young Hardesty surveyed the heap.

"Looks like we was goin' to bush down here all winter."

"Not all winter. You see, I got to go back to my cabin and feed my cats, sometime. But I aim to be organized in case somebody shows up."

"Like you was minin'?"

"Exactly. Suppose you trot up to the spring and fill this here canteen. Then we'll get supper. Wait a minute. I notice your horse ain't here. If you run onto him, you might just take off saddle and bridle. He'll feel more comfortable, and so will I. You see, if he's running loose, without a saddle, he's anybody's horse."

Young Hardesty didn't want to give up the horse. But he said nothing. Near the spring he found him and hid the bridle and saddle in the brush. When he returned, Bedrock was in the mine tunnel talking with Tonto Charley. Young Hardesty gathered wood for their supper fire.

The tiny fire, well up on the hillside, could be seen for many miles. Young Hardesty was worried. Bedrock reassured him. The posse had no pack animals with them, no immediate source of supplies. Finding no tracks of the fugitive at Indian Wells, they would make for the nearest town, secure provisions and most probably back track down to the big arroyo. That would take them two days, at the best. Meanwhile Tonto Charley was resting, the fever was dying down. Soon he would be able to travel. Bedrock did not tell the boy that he had suggested to Tonto Charley a hiding place back in the Argus range—Bedrock's cabin in Pines Canyon. Nor did

the old man disclose his interest in their present location, the abandoned mine he had searched for, off and on, for years.

Talking with Tonto Charley, the old man had lighted a candle and thrust the miner's candlestick in the wall of the tunnel. Young Hardesty saw that the flame leaned noticeably toward the mouth of the tunnel. That meant a draft from inside. And that meant a shaft somewhere back in the hillside, another entrance to the mine. Young Hardesty determined to discover it in the morning.



YOUNG Hardesty was up early next morning, gathering wood for their breakfast fire. After breakfast, at which Tonto Charley took coffee and bacon, although still unable to be on his feet, Young Hardesty borrowed a bit of lead pencil from the old man, and tearing a piece of wrapping paper into four parts, sat making marks on them. Presently he said he would get some water and see how the pony was making out.

He was gone a long time. When he returned with a canteen of water, Bedrock was clearing away rock and dirt from above the tunnel. Asked if he had found the pony, Young Hardesty replied that he had not, but that Misery was grazing on a flat half way up the mountainside.

"Get your location notices posted?" said Bedrock.

Taken aback, Young Hardesty was for evading the question. But the old man's eyes were disconcerting.

"Got 'em posted, all right," declared Young Hardesty, throwing out his chest. "Had an awful hard time locating the southwest corner. Took me a hell of a while to locate the old shaft, too. I put your name down as a witness." Now if he wasn't a regular prospector, let Bedrock tell him.

The old man smiled. "Doubt if those location notices would hold, seeing you're not twenty-one yet. But they'll do for just now. So you set out and found the

old shaft? Mighty smart boy. How come you knew there was an old shaft?"

"Saw by the way the candle burned, last night. Anybody could tell from that."

Misery, an orphan burro Bedrock had raised by hand, never strayed far from camp. Consequently he never suffered the indignity of hobbles or a stake rope. He was a wise burro. Turned loose, he found the nearest grazing and made the most of it until Bedrock wanted him. He always came at Bedrock's halloo, and was unfailingly rewarded with a cold biscuit or some such morsel. Misery and the stolen pony kept pretty well together, grazing on the same flat far up the mountainside.

Bedrock himself spent most of the day inspecting the claim. There was a legend that the old mine had paid fairly well, that the original owner, a Norwegian, had been murdered, and the claim-jumpers run off by hastily organized vigilantes. That had happened years ago. The mine had been all but forgotten. With the provisions Bedrock had fetched along a small supply of powder, fuse and caps. With the old tools in the mine and a little ingenuity he felt he could convince a curious posse that his operations in the arroyo were legitimate.

Though weak from fatigue and loss of blood, Tonto Charley was much better. He had begun to eat again, and that afternoon he curled a cigarette and smoked. Surprised at Tonto's reckless indifference about being discovered, and feeling that Tonto was more or less his personal charge, Young Hardesty asked what he expected to do if the posse showed up.

Tonto Charley replied that Bedrock and he had worked out a plan. Young Hardesty felt hurt and jealous. They hadn't taken him into their confidence.

"If that's the way you fellas are goin' to do, you can go to hell, you and Bedrock, both of you."

"He wouldn't be bad company, at that," said Tonto, grinning.

"He was my pardner, first."

Tonto Charley's face became suspiciously serious. "Now I thought I was."

Young Hardesty was somewhat mollified. But he wasn't altogether satisfied. He had to do something to show he was just as much of a man as either of them.

So that afternoon he took a candle and some matches and explored the tunnel up to the shaft, and made his way through it to its brush-covered entrance on the southern hillside. Dirty, scratched and bruised, he returned to the camp. In his pocket was a chunk of ore. While Bedrock was clearing away brush from the mouth of the tunnel, Young Hardesty showed him the ore. Bedrock hefted it, scratched it, looked at it through his pocket glass.

"Where did you find this?"

Young Hardesty told him.

"Thought you was watching out for that posse."

"A fella can't just sit watchin' all the time."

"I reckon not. Did you show this to him?" Bedrock nodded toward the tunnel.

"Nope. He ain't a minin' man."

Bedrock thrust the ore into a pack sack. "That's right. He's more interested in horses, just now."

Young Hardesty's intuitions were sharp. From Bedrock's manner he gathered that while the old man was willing to help Tonto Charley out of his difficulties, he did not approve of him. Perversely the boy felt drawn toward Tonto, in his eyes a romantic figure, a man who could back down Taggerts and help himself to horses and make his getaway with a .45 slug in his arm.



THE second day at the mine Tonto Charley became restless. He asked where the pony was and borrowed an extra supply of matches and tobacco. Toward noon he said he thought he would pull out. Bedrock advised him to rest as long

as he could. That afternoon Young Hardesty had climbed to a jutting rock far above camp, where he sat watching the desert. Bedrock had said it would take the posse at least two days to return to the arroyo. A few hundred yards up the hillside, Misery and the pony grazed. Down near the old shaft was a bridle and saddle. If Tonto Charley didn't make his getaway this time it would be nobody's fault but his own.

At first Young Hardesty thought he was mistaken. A second glance convinced him that the black specks out there on the desert were horsemen. It must be the posse. There were several of them. Ordinary folk seldom traveled the desert trails in groups of four or five at a time. Climbing to the flat above, Young Hardesty led the pony down to the mouth of the old shaft, saddled and tied him. Making his way round to the tunnel, he restrained himself from shouting, "They're coming!" Only a kid would do that. Nonchalantly he pointed toward the distant black specks. "Notice anything funny out there?"

"Yes," replied Bedrock. "Charley has been noticing 'em for quite a spell."

"Bet you I seen 'em first."

"Bet you did. Who are they, son?"

"I reckon you know. It's that dog-gone posse."

"Charley," Bedrock called to Tonto, who was seated on a rock in the tunnel, "the boy says the strangers out yonder is a posse."

"Then it's about time for us to clear out."

"Us?" Young Hardesty didn't understand.

"It's this way, son," explained Bedrock. "Charley ain't in shape to ride far. But mebby he can make it to Pipes Canyon. My place is up at the head of the canyon. Across the hills he can reach there about two hours sooner than he could by the desert trail. Likewise, he won't leave any tracks up the canyon. Now mebby you wouldn't mind going

along with him. Somebody's got to go over and feed my cats. Suppose you catch up that pony and fetch him down here for Charley."

"Huh!" snorted Young Hardesty, "think I been sleepin'? My horse is at the old shaft, saddled and ready to go. If Tonto is stout enough to make the ride, I reckon *he* can feed your cats."

"Oh, I don't need the kid," said Tonto, casually. "I just thought he might like to come along and kind of point out the trail. I don't know this country."

In spite of the fact that he surmised a catch in it somewhere, Young Hardesty felt big and important. But he didn't exactly relish the idea of making the journey on foot. "Mebby I could ride Misery."

"Mebby you could." Bedrock smiled. "I can't. You see, son, Misery ain't just what you'd call responsible with anything but a pack on him."

Young Hardesty hesitated. Bedrock glanced at Tonto Charley. "It would be a mite better if you went along, son. If you stayed you'd have a heap of explaining to do. And while you're a right smart hand at telling some powerful good ones, there's a limit." Bedrock was quite serious. He wanted to get the boy out of the way before the posse arrived, not alone for Young Hardesty's sake, but for his own.

Tonto Charley, tall, heavy-set, pale through several days' growth of beard, stood in the mine tunnel gazing out across the desert. He didn't seem worried or in any haste to leave. Young Hardesty was impressed.

"I'll go," he said slowly.

Bedrock smiled. "Three, four days more and Charley will be traveling. Then you can come back here, and we'll take a good look at the mine.

"No hurry." Tonto Charley gestured. "They're heading back north. Wonder who they are, anyhow?"

The distant riders had changed their course. Perhaps it was not a posse after

all. Young Hardesty felt disappointed.

"Doggone it, are them fellas goin' to keep us waitin' here all winter?"

"Not me." Tonto Charley was laughing.

Bedrock put his hand on Young Hardesty's shoulder. "You're the best man in this outfit. Most any time you'll do to take along."

Young Hardesty glanced at Tonto Charley to see if he were duly impressed. Tonto looked queer, seemed to be swaying on his feet.

"Look at him!" cried the boy.

Bedrock jumped and caught Tonto just as he fell.

"Is he dead?" Young Hardesty was frightened, his voice solemn.

"No, son. He got on his feet too soon. You see his body ain't quite as stout as his nerve, yet."

Presently Tonto's eyes unclosed. He glanced about. "What the hell!" he murmured, and immediately fell asleep. Bedrock turned to see a solemn, white-faced boy staring at him. Just a bit ashamed of showing his feelings, Young Hardesty covered up by taking the canteen and going for water. Bedrock had used quite a lot in bringing Tonto Charley to.

Kneeling at the spring, which was at the head of the arroyo far above the camp, watching the slow bubbles form in the bottom, Young Hardesty saw what looked like a tiny bead move on the sand. Indian beads they were that you sometimes found in a spring, put there long ago as an offering to the gods that made rain. Occasionally his father had showed him beads in the bottom of a spring, but never in the desert. Always in the clear, cool water of the hills. If you found a turquoise bead it would bring you luck. Young Hardesty peered at the slowly moving bubbles and the tiny black beads moving as if alive. Perhaps there was a turquoise bead among them. He thrust in his arm. There was no blue bead in the first few he gathered. He tried again. This time he found a

turquoise bead among the others. That meant good luck. Now he would have to wait for the water to clear before he could fill the canteen. He stared as the fine sand slowly settled. A hand touched his shoulder.

"Well, kid, I see you're here yet."

He was too startled to jump or cry out. His first actual sensation was anger at having been caught napping, his next was fear for Tonto Charley. But he wouldn't let on he was scared.

"Sure I'm here. If you're lookin' for water you'll have to wait till this here spring settles." He turned his head. Strange blue eyes in a deeply tanned face were gazing at him. "Oh, it's you?"



Young Hardesty pretended indifference. "I thought you fellas was over in the bad-lands."

Deputy Wright signaled to some one in the brush. A tall, lean peace officer stepped up, the reins of his horse in his hand.

"Other boys down below?" said Wright.

The tall deputy nodded.

Wright turned to the boy. "This time we'll take you along."

Young Hardesty was scared and no mistake. "I ain't done nothin'."

"But you said considerable—about a

man you met at Indian Wells. You'll have to think up a better yarn this time."

Watching his chance to make a dash into the brush, Young Hardesty looked something like a tom cat cornered by a couple of big dogs. His back was up and his eyes glared. "Got to fill this here canteen," he declared, "and take it—" he had almost said, "to Bedrock."

"Take it where?"

"Up to my camp." He pointed toward the timbered crest of the range, the farthest spot from the mine that he could think of.

"Too bad. We're riding the other way."

Doggone peace officers! Doggone turquoise beads! If he hadn't fooled with those beads he wouldn't have been caught. Now the peace officers would ride down to camp, shoot old Bedrock full of holes and capture Tonto Charley. Charley wouldn't be able to do a thing. He was all in.

"This time," Deputy Wright spoke quietly and with no apparent personal feeling, "you'll step up and ride in front of me. Come on."

The chief deputy's hand was still on his shoulder.

"Of course," said Wright, "if there's somebody down the arroyo you don't want us to meet—" he paused, watching the boy.

"Ain't nobody down the arroyo that I know anything about."

"Then step up, and sit still. You won't get hurt if you behave."

Young Hardesty didn't know what to do or say. He walked to Wright's horse and climbed into the saddle. Wright had hold of the reins. The chief deputy mounted and nodded to his partner.

"You better ride ahead, Bob."

Young Hardesty had been up and down the arroyo so often that the track to the mine was almost a trail. With field glasses, the posse, again approaching the big arroyo, had that morning spotted the mine tunnel, now cleared of brush, and the figures of Young Hardesty and an old, white bearded man in blue jeans. With never a sign to show that the man they were after had been in the vicinity of Indian Wells, there was but one conclusion. He must be somewhere in the neighborhood of the big arroyo. An inspection of the saddle while Young Hardesty had been coming to after the pony fell, convinced them that the outlaw was badly wounded. They were not after Tonto Charley for having stolen a pony from Bowdry, but for a far more serious matter. They had orders to get him, dead or alive. Consequently, two of the deputies had made their approach from the rear, circling into the foothills above the arroyo and riding down to the spring, where they found Young Hardesty. The other two were waiting near the mouth of the arroyo below the mine.

The man called Bob rode ahead, slowly, cautiously, watching every turn in the trail. Young Hardesty's heart was thumping. He might cry out, but he was still too far away to make Bedrock hear. He could kick Deputy Wright's horse on the jaw and make him lunge, and maybe throw him. But even a lunging horse would only delay matters a little. The

man called Bob would still be mounted and ready for business. What signal could he make that would reach Bedrock and Tonto Charley? Only one.

Deliberately the boy let his shoulder sag beneath the strap of the heavy canteen. The strap began to slip.

"Watch out," said Wright. "Your canteen is getting away from you."

Readjusting the strap Young Hardesty wriggled, half turned in the saddle, glimpsed the deputy's holster. Like a monkey snatching a hat through the bars of his cage, he grabbed the deputy's gun, swung it and fired into the air. The man called Bob whirled his horse, his own gun up and ready.

"You can have it, now," said Young Hardesty, as Wright grabbed his arm. "I ain't wishful to kill nobody."

"He's cooked our bacon." The lean deputy shrugged.

"Like hell he has!" Wright half shoved, half lifted the boy from the saddle, dropped him, and set spurs to his mount. "If you spot Tonto, drop him on sight!"

It would do no good to run after them. Hastily Young Hardesty climbed the south bank of the arroyo and crossed through the brush to the old mine shaft. If Tonto and Bedrock had heard the shot they would know something was wrong. Tonto would make for the shaft. He knew the pony was there, saddled and ready. Young Hardesty untied the pony and stood waiting.

What if his friends hadn't heard the shot? The officers would dash into camp and shoot Tonto Charley down before he could even start to run. Wright had said to shoot him on sight. What would Bedrock do? Would he put up a fight, or would he circumnavigate? Young Hardesty's toes twisted in his boots. He wanted to do something. This standing still was worse than getting licked. It would be great if old Bedrock took them for claim jumpers and just knocked 'em off the roost. But no. Young Hardesty

didn't want the chief deputy to get shot. It didn't matter so much about the other one.

Young Hardesty peered into the mouth of the old shaft. He could see nothing, hear nothing. Perhaps Tonto Charley was already dead and the officers were packing his body down the arroyo. Maybe Bedrock was dead, also. If those officers had killed Bedrock, he would never let up till he got them. Maybe he'd have to wait till he grew up, but he would get them. Of course, Tonto Charley expected to get killed, someday. It was kind of like part of his trade. But Bedrock wasn't a gunman. He didn't expect to get killed. That made a lot of difference.

The sound of a heel on loose rock caused Young Hardesty's heart to jump in his throat. Tonto Charley staggered out of the old shaft, into the daylight, peered about, half-blinded by the sun.

"Hello, kid!" He was carrying Bedrock's Winchester. "We'll be leaving. Glad you got that canteen. Didn't have time to grab one. Hand her up."

"I'm goin' with you," called Young Hardesty. Tonto Charley was making time up the mountain. Either he didn't hear or didn't want to hear. Young Hardesty felt that the bottom had dropped out of his world. Tonto Charley was gone. What had happened to Bedrock? Young Hardesty climbed to a ledge and surveyed the hillside. Deputy Wright and the man called Bob were standing near the tunnel talking with Bedrock. Evidently there had not been a fight. Bedrock must have circumnavigated. Young Hardesty heaved a sigh of relief as he took up Tonto Charley's trail.



AN active man on foot and a horse can make about the same speed on the up and down trails of the hill county.

In some stretches a man will outdistance a horse, in others he will be put to it to keep up with him. Down the west slope

of the Argus Young Hardesty followed pony tracks. There was no trail. Tonto Charley, with Bedrock's directions in mind, was taking the shortest cut to the head of Pipes Canyon. Clear of the timber, Young Hardesty surveyed the valley below. A hat showed above the shoulder-high brush, and the head of a horse, bobbing at a fast walk. Taking the long grade at a half run, finally he reached the stream bed, where he lost the tracks of the pony. Pipes Canyon was to the south. Of course Tonto Charley had taken to the stream to cover his trail.

Young Hardesty found himself in rough country. Slabs and cubes of rock, some of them half as big as a house, stood here and there, edged by brush and small broken rock. He swung to the west. After a stiff climb he reached the eastern slope of the next range, where he sat resting and watching the back trail. For a man unfamiliar with the country Tonto had been making remarkably good time. Young Hardesty wondered what was happening back at the mine. Were the deputies still trying to locate Tonto Charley? Had they arrested Bedrock? Did they actually know that Tonto Charley had been in the tunnel, or had they only guessed it? And would they finally pick up his tracks and follow them to Pipes Canyon? Young Hardesty rested not longer than five minutes, but in that time he had questioned himself as to the outcome of it all. Why was he following Tonto? What good would come of it when he did arrive at the canyon? Tonto Charley would lay up a few days and then ride away—south, probably, into Mexico. It would be great to take a trip down into Mexico with Charley. There were so many things to see. There were mines, there, too—rich mines, his father had said. Maybe when Tonto got down into Mexico he would quit being an outlaw and take to mining. It was all right being an outlaw for a while. But a fellow couldn't be on the run all his life.

Somewhat sobered by his reflections, Young Hardesty started out again. Climbing among broken rock and brush, he came to a slope dotted with junipers. Junipers meant higher country. Ascending the gentle slope he struck the gray rim-rock of the canyon, at last. He made out a windlass and a log platform. Still he could see neither a trail down, or the cabin. Finding there was no way into the canyon from the north rim, or along the end where it boxed, he followed around to the south, discovered a ledge trail, and started down. The trail showed no pony tracks.

Still thinking Tonto Charley might be ahead of him, Young Hardesty made his way down to the canyon floor and crossed to the windlass. He had only to follow the plain trail from the windlass to find Bedrock's headquarters.

The cabin was clean-swept, shelves, table and cooking things neat and clean. An old clock ticked leisurely on the shelf above the fireplace. Young Hardesty was inspecting the premises when a huge white and yellow cat strolled in, purring. It rubbed against his legs. He opened a can of milk and fed the cat. But Bedrock had said cats. He discovered the other cat, also white and yellow, nursing kittens in the tool shed. As she didn't seem friendly, he made no overtures, simply placed a pan of milk for her and let her alone. Where was Tonto Charley?

A trip to the corral, another trip to the shaft, a look at the tools in the shed, and more than a glance at the geraniums growing along the north side of the cabin, and Young Hardesty decided it was time for supper. He was surprised to find that Bedrock had a Bible. The almanac on the shelf was all right, and the mail order catalogue which Young Hardesty decided to read when he had time. But a Bible. He had seen but one or two Bibles in his life.

It was a snug and comfortable cabin. If only Tonto Charley would show up.

Dusk crept into the canyon. Young Hardesty lighted a lamp. He wasn't lonesome or scared. Only kids got scared at night. But he took great comfort in the presence of the big friendly tom cat. Young Hardesty went to the doorway and peered into the shadows. He wished that Bedrock would take a notion to return to his cabin. Searching about, Young Hardesty found an old, disused cap and ball revolver. It wasn't loaded, but it was kind of comfortable to have it. Maybe Bedrock would give it to him. He would clean it up, get some ammunition. . . .

A soft halloo quavered through the still, night air. Young Hardesty dropped the pistol and stood looking toward the doorway.

"Halloo . . . Kid . . ." It came clearer this time.

Young Hardesty stepped out into the open. "Hallo, yourself! Who the hell are you, and what do you want?"

He thought he heard a laugh. He was sure he heard the creak of a saddle as if someone had stepped off a horse. Tonto Charley came through the darkness, his bandaged arm stiff by his side. He carried Bedrock's Winchester.

"Any horse-feed around here?"

Was that all Tonto had to say after what had happened? Young Hardesty thought he could be just as offhand and independent. "Horse-feed? Sure. Stack of mountain hay in the lean-to next to the corral."

"You might throw an armful to the pony. I watered him up the stream. How are you making it?"

"Fine. I was wonderin' why you didn't show up."

"Were you, son? Well, I was laying up on the rim watching you poke down into the canyon. Thought I'd wait a spell, and see how things went."

"Well, I'm telling you one thing." Young Hardesty grew chesty. "If I couldn't find where you left the stream

back in Argus valley, I admire to say them deputies can't."

In the cabin the lamplight showed Tonto Charley white and tired, his eyes heavy. After a meal he seemed to pick up. His arm was bothering him. Would Young Hardesty help him wash the wound and rebandage it? Young Hardesty did it surprisingly well.

Spots glowed on Tonto's cheeks. His eyes seemed overbright. He took one of Bedrock's blankets, loaded an old pair of saddlebags with food, and stepped outside.

"Turn the lamp down a little, and leave it," he told the boy.

"Where you goin'?"

Tonto Charley did not answer. The boy followed him to the corral. The pony munched hay. Tonto squatted nearby, Young Hardesty beside him. Tonto had nothing to say. The companionship was strangely pleasant to him. He wanted to talk, but decided to follow Tonto's example. Across the clearing the lamp showed soft gold in the cabin window. Tonto wasn't taking any chances. If visitors arrived, they would be apt to make for the lighted cabin.

"How far is it to Mexico?" It was the boy who finally broke the silence.

"About a day's ride." Tonto gave him a side glance. "Want to see Mexico, son?"

"Oh, I dunno. Mebby."

"Get yourself a horse and come along."

"Honest?"

"I said so."

Impelled by his liking for the boy, admiring him for his nerve and loyalty, Tonto had yielded to impulse in asking Young Hardesty to come along with him. Yet hardly had Tonto spoken, when he regretted to see the boy glance up at him with such intense pleasure in his eyes.

"Get yourself a horse . . ." Young Hardesty was saying to himself. But Tonto must be only joshing him. How could he get an extra horse? "Horses," he said,

trying to keep the eagerness out of his voice, "are kind of scarce in these parts. We only got one between us."

Tonto Charley averted his eyes from that bright shining. He nodded as if talking to himself. "Ybarra's rancho is only about three hours south of here."

Young Hardesty himself had never been south of Pipes Canyon. He looked at Tonto quizzically. "Thought you said you didn't know this country?"

Tonto chuckled. "We could pick up a couple of horses at Ybarra's. Buy 'em, I mean. I know Ybarra."

"Buy 'em!"

"Sure. A fellow don't steal horses from his friends."

"Well, I ain't got but two bits."

Tonto Charley reached into his shirt and unsnapped the flap of a pocketed money belt. Young Hardesty could hear the jingle of coin. Tonto shoved something into his hand.

"Enough to get you a good mount, son. You'll want to pick your own horse, and pay for him yourself."

Young Hardesty fingered the money in the starlight, ten-dollar gold pieces, and Tonto Charley had given him five of them. Fifty dollars! He could buy a good bronc for twenty.

"Got to have a saddle, too," he said, half to himself.

Tonto gestured toward the pony in the corral. "You can have that hull after we get to Ybarra's. I'm getting me a new rig, complete."

So Tonto meant it, after all! Young Hardesty didn't know what to say. He wanted to thank Tonto, but somehow he couldn't find the right words.

"I'll sure go with you," he said.

Tonto Charley stood up. He thrust out his hand. "So long, pardner. You're the best man in the outfit." Tonto led the pony out of the corral.

"Where you goin'?"

"I'm bushing out, tonight. Mebby up on the rim. See you in the morning."

Of course, Tonto wouldn't sleep in the cabin. Young Hardesty knew it would be a foolish thing to do. Tonto mounted and began to ride up the canyon. Young Hardesty called softly. Tonto stopped.

"What you want, son?"

Young Hardesty called a quavering, "So long."

Tonto Charley chuckled. The sound of his pony's hoofs died away in the darkness. A mountain owl called from the canyon rim. Young Hardesty felt physically empty, as if overtaken by an acute spell of homesickness.



DAWN had barely touched the edge of the canyon when Young Hardesty got up and began to make breakfast. They would have to borrow a little extra grub for their trip to Ybarra's rancho. But Bedrock wouldn't mind. A web of mist hung above the canyon, eddying slowly in the tops of the tall trees—as a long finger of light poked through. Puttering about the stove, Young Hardesty upset Bedrock's can of salt. That meant bad luck. But then, turquoise beads were supposed to mean good luck, and see what had happened at the spring. When the canyon floor became light enough for him to distinguish objects, Tonto Charley rode down the ledge trail to the cabin. He looked refreshed by his night's rest. Young Hardesty noted that Bedrock's blanket was rolled and tied back of the saddle. Of course, it was all right to take Bedrock's blanket along. But when, after breakfast, Tonto untied the blanket and put it back in the cabin, Young Hardesty was puzzled.

"When we goin' to start for Mexico?"

Tonto Charley was packing a small supply of provisions into the saddle pockets. "Oh, in a couple of days."

"I thought mebby you was gettin' ready to light out this mornin'."

Young Hardesty lugged water from the spring to wash the dishes. Something bothered him vaguely. Things didn't

seem just right. Tonto had laughed and joked during breakfast. He didn't seem to be worrying about anything. Tonto had said the rancho was three hours south. That meant about twelve or fifteen miles. Naturally Tonto would ride. Young Hardesty reasoned that he himself would walk. He was good for it. After they reached Ybarra's he would have his own horse and saddle. Then for Mexico.

He was washing the dishes when Tonto came in. Rummaging among Bedrock's small sheaf of papers on the clock shelf, he found a pencil and sat down to the table. Folding the note he had written, he tucked it between two of Bedrock's three books.

Young Hardesty could not restrain his curiosity. "Was you tellin' Bedrock so long?"

Tonto nodded. "But I didn't put my name to it. Somebody might find it before Bedrock showed up." There was a strange look in Tonto Charley's eyes. Young Hardesty felt uneasy. Perhaps Tonto was worrying about being followed by the posse, and didn't want to show it. Taking Bedrock's mail order catalogue, Tonto sat in the doorway reading it. Presently he asked Young Hardesty if he would mind climbing up to the rim and taking a look round the country. "If you spot any one," said Charley, "just wave your hat."

"I'll do her, pardner!" Young Hardesty reasoned that if the posse had managed to pick up Tonto's trail and were anywhere near the head of the canyon it would be a mighty good thing to know about it. If he signaled, Tonto would saddle up and ride down the main canyon and take to the desert. In that case he wouldn't be able to go with Tonto, then. But Tonto would wait for him at Ybarra's. Young Hardesty did not relish the idea of making it to the rancho on foot and alone. But he would make it, or bust.

A long hard climb brought Young Hardesty to the brush country sur-

rounding the canyon. He glanced down. Tonto was no longer in the doorway of the cabin. It took Young Hardesty half an hour to reach the north rim. From here he could survey both the country back of the canyon and the canyon itself. Something was wrong. He hadn't waved his hat, and yet Tonto had saddled the pony and was riding up the south rim trail. He was about half way up. He must have started some time ago. So preoccupied was the boy in watching Tonto that for the moment he forgot his real mission. What had happened? Had Tonto set out because someone was coming up the main canyon? Yet he was taking it easy, didn't seem to be watching the back trail.

But what he next saw caused him to crouch trembling in the brush. A few hundred yards west, evidently making for the south rim round the end of the canyon, the heads and shoulders of two horsemen appeared. Young Hardesty at once identified them as members of the posse. He watched them for a moment, realized fully Tonto's danger, and rising waved his hat. Tonto Charley did not seem to see him. Frantically he waved his hat again. Still Tonto kept on. The two horsemen would arrive at the south rim about the time unsuspecting Tonto reached the top.

Slowly the horsemen swung round the head of the canyon. Slowly Tonto Charley approached the rim. Young Hardesty danced up and down in sheer desperation. His friend was riding right into the guns of the peace officers.

Young Hardesty tried to call out, but his mouth was dry and his throat tight. Finally he found his voice, lifted it in a long, shrill halloo. He saw Tonto Charley turn his head, rein in his pony, then suddenly spur him. He was on the flat rimrock now. A rifle cracked. Tonto jumped his horse behind a juniper. Again a rifle cracked. Handicapped by his injured arm, Tonto was resting the barrel of Bedrock's rifle on a branch and pump-

ing shot after shot. Puffs of pale smoke rose round the juniper, drifted away. Tonto was still in the saddle, replying to the rifles of the peace officers. Young Hardesty fairly ached to be in it, to help his partner. Two rifles were raking the juniper behind which Tonto Charley was hidden, and he, with one arm helpless and on old .44 Winchester was standing them off.

Young Hardesty let out a shout as one of the posse horses dropped. That meant one man afoot. If Tonto managed to break away, there would be but one man left to follow him.

The man whose horse had dropped didn't get up. The other, evidently having emptied his rifle, had drawn his pistol and was charging straight for the juniper. Young Hardesty saw Tonto wheel his pony and spur across the rimrock, the mounted deputy after him. Young Hardesty did not know that Tonto Charley had emptied the rifle, dropped it. He did not see Tonto whirl his horse behind another juniper. But the boy heard a pistol shot, easily distinguishable from the crack of a rifle. And he saw a blur of tumbling horse and rider as the other peace officer went down.

The fight was over. Young Hardesty could feel his heart thumping. Tonto was still in the saddle. Now he would ride out a ways and wait. Young Hardesty started to back track round the end of the canyon. He came upon the peace officer whose horse had been shot. He lay pinned down by the animal. Young Hardesty hesitated, wanted to lend a hand, but his anxiety for Tonto Charley urged him on. Farther along he came upon the other officer. It was Chief Deputy Wright. He was on his feet, apparently not hit, but his horse was dead. In the distance Tonto Charley was riding slowly south, occasionally glancing back. Young Hardesty waved his hat, but Tonto kept on.

Glancing at Young Hardesty, the chief

deputy started toward his companion pinned under the horse. Young Hardesty stood watching Tonto Charley.

He couldn't follow him now. He would only be a drag to him. Tonto wouldn't lose any time getting out of sight. Biting his lip to keep from sobbing, Young Hardesty started down the canyon trail. He would wait till the deputies cleared out. Then he would make for Ybarra's rancho, and Charley. Perhaps Charley would be waiting for him.



ARRIVING at the cabin, Young Hardesty took from his pocket the money Tonto Charley had given him and counted it again. Fifty dollars. He would be able to make it to the rancho, buy a horse, and if Charley was not waiting, follow him to Mexico. As for the deputies up on the rim, he didn't care what they did, so long as they left him alone. But he ought to leave some kind of a message for Bedrock. Bedrock had been mighty decent.

The note Tonto had written came to mind. Perhaps that would be message enough for both of them. Young Hardesty took it from between the mail order catalogue and the Bible. "Keep the fifty, kid. It's yours. You earned it. Good luck to you and Bedrock. My game is no good. I'm pulling out this morning. Stick to Bedrock. His game is square." The note was unsigned.

So Tonto Charley hadn't meant to take him along after all!

Young Hardesty's eyes filled. He felt, somehow, that he had been cheated out of a great adventure. He wanted to hate Tonto for having fooled him. But he couldn't. No, he couldn't hate a man who had put up a fight like that. Cross his arms on the table, he laid his head on his arms. His shoulders heaved. Doggone it, his whole world was busted up! One suspender slipped off and hung in a limp oval. Someone was coming down the canyon trail. It was the two

deputies. But he didn't care. They could kill him if they wanted to.

Although they had come out of the fight with Tonto Charley without getting hit, Deputy Wright and his companion were in a bad fix. They were afoot, far from any habitation, and both their horses were dead. Knowing Tonto Charley's reputation as a gunman, they realized he deliberately shot the horses from under them, recklessly chancing it that he wouldn't get hit himself. Again his luck had stood him in good stead. Long before they could get new mounts he would be across the line.

The deputies, however, did not vent any of their ill feeling on Young Hardesty. To the contrary, Deputy Wright cooked a good dinner for all of them, paid a compliment to Bedrock's neatness in housekeeping, and later took the boy aside. Wright did not ask him a question about the outlaw, nor censure him for having helped him. He did say, however, that Tonto's game was no good. He did not seem to feel personally bitter toward the outlaw, simply seemed to consider him as one of a class any new raw country begets. Outlaws, he said, were like boils. They sometimes made a lot of trouble, but in the end they always busted.

"Now take old Bedrock," said the chief deputy. "I don't say he doesn't sometimes sympathize with the fellow the law is after. But he would never run with the wild bunch. He's got more sense."

In spite of his bitterness, Young Hardesty warmed toward this peace officer, who, though utterly unlike Tonto Charley, was a real man all the way. Vaguely the boy felt that Deputy Wright was trying to be his friend. Finally Young Hardesty showed him the note Tonto had written. The deputy read it and passed it to his companion.

"None of them," he said, "are as bad as they think they are. Tonto got to running with the wrong outfit in the be-

ginning. You notice, kid, that he says to stick to Bedrock. That's about the wisest thing he ever said."

Next morning, leaving their saddles and most of their equipment in the cabin, Wright and his partner set out on foot for the mine. There was nothing else to do. Two of their fellows were there. One of them would ride to Bowdry and get extra horses.

The chief deputy knew Young Hardesty was tough and mighty independent, so he told him he would have to go along with them. Going along with them part way suited Young Hardesty perfectly, but he was dead set against going any farther than Bedrock and the mine. If they took him to the county seat, he vowed to himself he would answer no questions about Tonto Charley. They might lock him up, but dog-gone if he would talk.

That afternoon they arrived at Bedrock's headquarters. Surmising that the officers intended to take him with them after their mounts came from Bowdry, Young Hardesty began practising silence. The second day following their arrival a deputy returned with the horses. In the meantime Young Hardesty hadn't said a word beyond yes or no, even to Bedrock. Now, as the posse prepared to leave camp, they didn't seem to be paying any attention to him. Presently Wright stepped up and held out his hand.

"I was going to take you in, but I changed my mind. Stick to Bedrock, son. You'll last longer."

Young Hardesty broke his long silence to say stubbornly, "I don't see but what Tonto Charley is lastin' pretty good."

Did the chief deputy frown or smile? Young Hardesty didn't know.

The officers rode away. For a moment the boy stood watching them. He turned to Bedrock. "I fed them cats. One of 'em, the she cat, has got a mess of new kittens. Tonto, he's over the hill. First off I figured I'd go with him.

But I changed my mind. I thought I'd come back and see how the old mine is getting along."

Wright had talked with Bedrock. The old man gazed at the boy. "The mine is doing tolerable, son. Reckon it will do better, now you're on the job. If that pay streak where you found the specimen holds out, we're in danger of getting rich."

Young Hardesty thrust out his chest. "That don't worry me none. I'm rich already." He drew Tonto Charley's gift from his pocket.

"I don't know where he got it," said Bedrock. "Ours, we're getting from the main source, right where the Lord put it."

Young Hardesty was awed. He had not known that the Lord had anything to do with ore. But his awe was momentary. His actual interest just then was in other things. It had just come to him, partly from his own intuition, partly from what the officers had said, that Tonto Charley had not really deserted him. Somebody would have to help wash and bandage his arm, step lively round camp, and kind of look after him till he got well. Yes, he bet Tonto had wanted to take him along, and hated to leave him behind. Perhaps Tonto had been right to light out alone after all.

Through a maze of peace officers, Bedrocks, burros, horses, mine tunnels, canyons, desert and brush-covered hillsides rose a phantom figure—a man riding a bay cow pony down the southern reaches toward Old Mexico. The man's arm was bandaged. There was a stubble of beard on his face. He rode in an easy, reckless fashion. Young Hardesty could almost hear him say, "So long, kid."

The vision faded. In its place stood the figure of Bedrock, broad and as solid as the mountain behind him. Young Hardesty squared his shoulders. Well, Tonto Charley had been his pardner once, anyhow.



WHITE MAN IN ETHIOPIA

By "Redvers"

WHEEE! BONG! BONG! BONG! Lyster spat savagely and listened with impassive face to the echoes of the exploding bomb as they came back again and again with terrific detonations from the rocky hills.

A white man, he thought, mustn't show fear of these damn bombs or the blacks would run like hell. They were bigger than any he had ever encountered as a soldier of fortune in Paraguay, China and Manchuria. Cold chills ran up and down his spine accordingly, but the motley crew of Ethiopians would never have guessed it to look at his tanned, hard bitten face.

A moment later he saw the huge Italian bombing plane come above the trees, away from the tiny village on which it had been dropping its eggs.

After circling once or twice, like some huge homing pigeon, it started back for its base in Somaliland.

Turning slightly, he looked back into the gloom of the huge cave in which he and his company of ex-slaves who had been released to fight had taken cover, and almost laughed aloud as he saw nothing but the whites of their eyes in the dim light. He actually did grin at the stony face of his servant, Khan Agor. At the same moment he was glad to think that he had that huge Sikh with him, for Khan was more than a servant, he was a friend. Lyster had picked him up in Hong Kong, where he had been fired from the English police force for taking backsheesh from an opium peddler. Ever since, his loyalty had been unquestionable.

Khan saw his glance and looked meaningfully back into the gloom at the scraggly gang of so-called soldiers.

"I think, *sahib*," he said, "that we are in great trouble. These Italians are better fighters than any Japanese or Bolivians."

Lyster's grin did not fade even as he reached for a quinine pill.

"Well, thank God the wife back home in Vermont has got the ten thousand dollars all right," he answered. "It seems to me that will be the last check she'll ever get from this baby. That ought to keep her and the kids for the rest of her life, anyway."

"It is so, *sahib*," agreed the solemn Khan, "and I too am glad that my number one wife received her money, for now she can make the great pilgrimage to Mecca and pray for my poor misguided soul. At the same time I would rather make the trip myself and pray for her."

Whee bong! Out of the blue had appeared another great tri-motored plane and it too began to drop eggs on the empty village. *Whee bong! Whee bong! Whee bong!*

Lyster mechanically counted the bombs as they dropped and at the sixth he suddenly turned and shouted an order.

"Alley-oop, you guys. Send up the officers."

There came a fearful groan from the crowds of bewildered slaves. Surely—surely this crazy white man was not going to take them out under that burning sun, where their white robes would show so clearly, for those devilmen of the air to see.

Very reluctantly three or four barefooted, khaki-clad men with the usual Sam Browne belt and revolver that make an officer in the Ethiopian army, came forward.

At the same moment Lyster saw his own guard of Mohammedan Bazurkas come up, bringing their revolvers and

rifles into prominent display. He laughed again. He knew as well as they did that this so-called guard, sent especially by the Emperor to protect him, was nothing more or less than a firing squad to shoot him down at the first sign of treachery on his part. But it didn't worry him in the slightest, for he had always been a good, fair, faithful servant to those who hired him and he did not intend to be otherwise now. He looked at the trembling officers with contempt showing only too plainly in his eyes.

"I see you, soldiers," he said in the universal coast English that is known by three Negroes out of five in Africa. "I see you, soldiers," he said again. "Get your men together and march them out, *compree?*"

The youngest of the officers, very apparently an Ahmaric from Addis Ababba and in charge of the company, came forward. His name was Ras Tefali, and evidently the little white blood in his veins made him less superstitious than the others, for he still had some remnants of self respect left when he faced Lyster.

"But why, O white man," he said, "do we go out from this place where devil bombs can not hurt to where they will smite us down?"

"Because," explained Lyster slowly and clearly, "because the *franchi* (foreign) soldiers will soon be upon us. Those devil bombs but prepare the way. We must go out there and lie hidden until they arrive and then shoot them down like so many vultures. These *soldats* will be upon their feet and not riding in the huge birds in the skies."

There was a hastily muttered argument in the Ahmaric tongue which most of the soldiers and officers spoke. After a palaver of some minutes in which the whole lot seemed to join, Ras Tefali once more became spokesman.

"I see you, white man," he said, his teeth shining in the gloom, "and I know that what you say is true, but these *sol-*

dots who crawl on their bellies will be many and we are few. We think it better to go back even further into the jungle and there lie in wait for the *franchis*. Our comrades will join us there and we will make a great fight and kill the Italia soldiers in the thousands."

"No," said Lyster shortly, "the great king, the ruler of all the earth and the lion of Judah, says that it is here we must stand and hold back the enemy until he is ready to come in his thousands and here we shall stay."

"See!" He went to the outside of the cave and pointed far down the rocky defile which lay at their feet. "See, even now the enemy come!"

Lyster was right, even Ras Tefali could see that. Far, far below, nearly six miles away, a long thin line of men was slowly plodding up the winding trail which led to the pass.

"We can hold them for many days if you will only fight." Lyster went on. "Are you women, that you should always fall back?"

Ras snarled something and made as if to step forward and shoot Lyster then and there. Khan saw the action; leaning forward, he took the chief in a grip that brought an involuntary groan from his lips.

For a moment there was dead silence in the cave and then the white man turned and harangued the crowd.

"You white-livered skunks, you dope-hounds and followers of women—get a little guts into you and be ready to fight. See—" he pointed down at the wicked muzzle of a Vickers machine-gun—"this gun that goes *ha-ha* so quick and kills so many men will be your friend. Stop the *soldats* here, where we can kill many. Get ready."

They could not understand what he said, of course, but they knew his meaning. Here and there an odd man among them gathered sufficient courage together to agree with the speaker.

Khan released the chief's arm and that

gentleman, realizing that if the truth ever got out about his advising a retreat, he would be hanged out of hand by the Emperor's henchmen, unwillingly gave in. They started to stumble out from the dark cave into the brilliant glare of the tropical sun.



LYSTER adjusted his sun helmet a little tighter; feeling to see that his Webley .45 was in a handy position, he started down the rocky walls of the defile which led to the trail. Khan and his guard followed behind.

For a moment the sky was clear of planes. They could not stay up very long, working so far from their base in Somaliland.

After arriving safely at the bottom, Lyster was busy for the next few minutes instructing and organizing the defense. That was his job; that was what he was paid to do, and he did it as efficiently as possible, considering the type of men he had to handle.

A few moments later scouts began to arrive announcing that the slowly moving Italian force was only a few miles away and that the defense would have to be hurried.

At this news Lyster himself lent a hand in rolling the stones that were to form a barricade across the rocky defile. Sweating and groaning in the hot sun, the irregulars finally got a wall of a sort built across the trail. As soon as this was done Lyster talked with Ras Tefali about the defense. He especially warned him to let no one shoot until the machine-gun had opened up. The young officer unwillingly issued the necessary orders. The men were then told to take cover up the sides of the trail and stay hidden until the machine-gun began operations.

Lyster had to admit that in spite of their white robes they could hide, for in a very few moments not one could be seen. He, with Khan and his guard,

undertook to hold the pass itself with their lone machine-gun and a few rifles.

It was none too soon, for hardly had he slumped in a shady spot to wait for eventual attack when the first Senegalese skirmisher appeared far down the pass.

What made it ideal for defense was the fact that the defile coming toward Lyster sloped slowly upwards, and where he stood was actually half-way up the great mountain called after a long dead Coptic priest. The pass reached its highest level where he stood and then started gradually downward towards the fever-ridden jungle which lay five thousand feet below.

There was no doubt about it, he thought, with a group of good men and a few machine-guns I could hold this place forever. Which showed only too well that even Lyster was not fully acquainted with the deviltry of modern warfare, for the very points that made it appear ideal for defense—its high, rocky, impassible walls on each side for example—made it a veritable death trap.

Suddenly Lyster stiffened. There had come the deep buzzing note of a rapidly approaching plane. That meant a scouting machine, indicating that the Italian main body could not be far behind.

The Senegalese scout was quite close now and the plane also grew rapidly nearer.

Lyster issued strict warning that no attempt was to be made to shoot the scout, for even the crack of a rifle echoed and reechoed astoundingly in the rocks and could be heard for miles.

His idea was to capture the scout, or at least kill him so quietly that those behind would not be warned. But at that moment he saw a puff of smoke drift lazily out from behind a rock. Far above him came the rippling, echoing roar of a heavy old Martini rifle.

Lyster groaned.

"That damn fool," he muttered, "has sure given the position away."

He had. There was no doubt about it, for although he had hit the scout, that gentleman had managed to pull his rifle forward and fire three shots in rapid succession even as he fell. There was no question that the Italians would catch the warning.

Suddenly the plane, which was high over his head, banked sharply and came diving down directly at them. Apparently it had seen the smoke.

Lyster hastily pulled the machine-gun around and turned the elevating wheel to its highest trajectory. He knew it was foolish to try to hit the plane but nevertheless he couldn't let the opportunity slip. Sometimes the odd bullet did get a vital spot.

Zoom. The wicked little Italian scout flattened out barely a thousand feet up and circled round and round trying to guess the number of enemy in the defile.

Lyster, lying flat on his back, raised the safety catch and waited for the scout to come into his sights.

Rattetty-tattety-tat-tat — Suddenly the roar of Lyster's gun woke the echoes.

"Holy Jumping Judas!" Lyster cried. "I got him!"

He had got him, for the daring scout plane had sideslipped drunkenly. When the pilot tried desperately to straighten out, the plane would not respond. Slowly the broken machine came lower and lower. As it went down in frantic circles, Lyster stopped shooting and waited breathlessly to see what would happen.

The pilot was fighting for life now and knew it. He tried to bring the plane into the straightaway but it wouldn't answer. Very apparently the controls were shot away.

The plane was headed straight into the narrow pass. It missed the side walls of the canyon by inches and now the pilot tried to make a forced landing.

He cut off the engine and tried to pancake down. As the machine touched ground it bounced lightly on the rocky road—at least it looked like a light

bounce but the undercarriage was completely torn off. The next time it touched, the broken plane turned completely over nose first and crashed.

A wild cry went up from the warriors hidden among the rocks. For the first time they understood why the emperor had sent this man to help them fight.

They forgot all about the oncoming Italians and, leaping wildly from the rocks, ran down the hill, yelling crazily and brandishing knives.

Lyster shivered. If that pilot is alive, he thought, he is going to get hell now. Suddenly his mind went over the horrible things he had seen done in this country in the name of the law. Men covered with oiled cotton and burned to death in their own funeral pyre. Others covered with honey and left to be stung to death. Still others horribly cut by inches. It suddenly dawned on him that if the pilot were alive, he was another white man, a man of his own kind.

As if an electric shock had struck him, he jumped to his feet and joined in the mad throng that was running towards the smashed plane.

"I hope he's dead," he muttered as he ran. "I hope he's dead, for by God if he isn't, there's going to be one hell of a time around here."



LYSTER, though used to the heat of many countries, soon found out that the terrific sun of Ethiopia was too much. Panting for breath and with sweat steaming down his body, he slowed down to a walk. The natives, more used to such things, were well ahead of him and already were uttering wild war cries that might mean anything. Lyster loosened the Webley, bringing it around to the front. Still walking slowly to conserve his strength, he made his way to the ring of natives who with brandished rifles and spears were packed around the smashed plane.

"Out of the way," he snarled, and pushing the natives to one side he

plowed through the mass of skinny men as if they were so much cheese.

As yet none of the natives had dared to go near to the plane for they were still fearful that this strange beast of the air, though apparently dead, might yet spring into vicious life. Probably that was why Lyster found his way made so easy. Kneeling down and peering under the wing towards the cockpit, he saw the head of the pilot. Very apparently the man was still alive, for he was struggling violently to loose himself.

Lyster stood up and turning to the crowd yelled:

"Get clear! Bombs! Bombs!"

Even the natives knew what that word meant now and they hastily made a large circle.

He crawled forward, and groaning with the heat and the malaria which made every point in his body ache, slowly made his way under the wrecked plane. He saw at a glance what the trouble was. The machine-gun, mounted forward and above the pilot so that it would fire through the propeller, had jammed downward directly across the pilot's seat, so that he was unable to get out.

Lyster, making as much speed as the heat and malaria would allow, crawled in. Putting his back under the gun, he was able to move it enough for the pilot to wriggle himself out onto the ground. He was just in time, for the acrid smell of gasoline was filling the air and even if a damaged wire did not start a fire the terrifically hot sun would certainly explode it. Hastily he seized the Italian pilot and dragged him clear.

The queer part of it was that his mind took in a small three or four pound bomb lying on the ground with its safety catch still on. He dropped the Italian pilot, who jabbered something in Italian and started to rub his bruised body.

Lyster in turn grabbed for the bomb and, getting clear, looked hastily at the plane. Sure enough, smoke was begin-

ning to appear. Yelling for everybody to get clear, he seized the pilot's arm and ran back up the defile toward the machine-gun and the safety of the rocks.

He was just in time, for there was a faint boom and the damaged plane began to crackle viciously.

That was probably what saved the Italian's life, for the frightened natives ran for cover now, and in a moment the pass was practically clear of human beings.

Lyster arrived at the gun and hastily motioned the Italian to lie down. They had barely touched the ground before the first small bomb exploded, to be rapidly followed by the others.

Pieces of shrapnel dropped whiningly around them but did no harm. A moment later a deadly silence fell on the little pass, broken only by the crackle of the still burning plane. Lyster now had a chance to look at his prisoner, for it dawned on him that that was exactly what this dark, curly-haired youngster was. He looked to be no more than nineteen or twenty years. He was smiling over at Lyster, his swarthy face shining with sweat and relief.

"You English?" the Italian asked.

"Yes, I am American. You speak English?"

"Sì, signor, I speak the very good English."

Even as he spoke, Lyster noticed that the other was taking in his own leathery face with its sharp, gray eyes inquiringly.

"You are for Ethiopia, yes?" he asked.

Lyster nodded again.

"Yes, I am for Ethiopia."

Glancing down, he saw that there was a revolver strapped to the other's side. He made a motion to Khan, who was silently waiting as usual, to get the gun.

Hearing a sudden yell from above he looked upward. What he saw made him change his mind about the gun. The natives were crawling out of their shelters, and, carrying knives and spears, were hastily making their way toward them.

He stood up, hearing something suspicious from behind. Khan whispered sibilantly:

"O master, the guards are here."

Lyster turned.

The guards *were* there, his escort, that the emperor had been so solicitous to give him. Ras Tefali, feeling and looking very important, came forward.

"It is so, friend, that this man is our prisoner?"

"I see you, I hear you," said Lyster shortly. "What is your will?"

The officer's eyes shone with vindictive hatred.

"He is ours," he said. "We will make him crawl with agony. We will take his stomach out while he still lives. He is the one who has caused death to many of our people and he should die—slowly."

Lyster's face went suddenly pasty white under his tan. What the hell had he done now? By shooting this pilot down he had made him rightly a prisoner of war. It meant that he would be given all the horrible tortures that the cunning Ethiopians could conjure up from the savage past. His head turned a little sidewise to the smiling youth. He looked so young.

Lyster saw his eyes shadow, as if he already saw the horror of what lay ahead.

The young man spoke.

"It seems that you made a big mistake in saving my life, *signor*."

Lyster looked a little stupidly at the ring of dark faces surrounding him. They were filled with all the lustful visions of the tortures they were already giving the boy in their minds. Once more it dawned on him that this youth was a white man—a white man, he repeated it to himself again and again.

As a paid soldier of Ethiopia he knew his duty and that was to hand this man over to the guard. It was none of his business what they did. Modern warfare, wherein bombing planes massacred innocent civilians behind the lines, justified him in doing nothing. Why, this very

man might have been the pilot of one of the heavy bombers which only the night before had struck down dozens of old men and women in the village below. Yes, war was queer nowadays—and yet—

He heard Khan whisper, "What is your will, master?"

Damn this fever, he thought wearily, for he ascribed the trembling of his body to that.

The guard stepped forward, sure that Lyster was ready to hand over the prisoner. One of them was actually slobbering at the mouth in lustful, sadistic passion.

Suddenly Lyster straightened. By God, he couldn't hand this man over to them. They wouldn't understand, of course, but this fellow was white and young. He was only doing his duty as he saw it. He held up his hand.

"Stop," he yelled. "Stop!"

A deadly silence fell.

Khan moved a little closer, fondling his rifle. Somehow he seemed to sense the difficulty his master found himself in, and although perhaps not knowing the why and wherefore was willing to back him up.

"Listen," cried Lyster, "this man is my prisoner. Mine—you understand, you poor, dumb heathen, and I won't hand him over."

The officer showed his teeth in a grim smile.

"And what will you do with him?" he asked. "Remember, your guard here will tell *you* what to do."

Lyster grinned in return. So the guard was out in the open at last. It dawned on him that he was in a jam of the worst kind. He knew, of course, that Mussolini had issued orders that any white man found with the Ethiopian army was to be shot on sight. He also knew that at the slightest sign of what they considered traitorous conduct on his part the Ethiopian guards would also shoot him down. Yet he couldn't let the poor devil be tortured.

Suddenly he remembered the bomb already gripped in his hand. His smile grew wider.

"Look you!" he cried. Lifting the bomb high, he pulled the safety catch so that only his thumb held the lever down.

"Look you, this man is my prisoner and I intend to hold him. See you now that if you fire I fall, my hand grows loose and you die. You die, you understand?"

They understood only too clearly. With a muttered cry of fear Ras Tefali hastily dove through the crowd to get clear. They had learned only too well the damage that even a little bomb could do. His own guards saw the crazy, reckless gleam in Lyster's eyes and slowly fell back. They were sure now that this white man was mad. Only a few days before, when he had been sick, he had cried out about large buildings that reached the sky.

As Lyster stood and watched them they fled to the rocks. At last he turned.

"Listen, you wop," he said harshly. "Get over that barricade and run like hell."

"But, my friend, you must come. They will kill you."

"No, they won't kill me if you get away, because they will need me, and besides I got to earn my money. You see it's been sent to the wife already. Beat it, I say." He almost screamed the last words, for he knew that his own guard might shoot any moment.

For one brief moment it looked as if the Italian would rebel, but as he looked upward and saw the snarling faces of the natives he didn't argue, but jumped lightly over the barricade and started to run.

Crack! Too late the Ethiopians saw that the white man had betrayed them and they began to fire.

With a snarl of rage, Lyster leaped for the gun, which was still elevated for high-angle firing, and let go a belt at both sides of the defile, still holding the bomb in his right hand.

The firing stopped as if turned off by a switch. The Italian pilot scuttled down the trail in a zigzag course like a startled deer and in an incredibly short time was out of rifle range.

As soon as all was clear Lyster, with a sigh that made even Khan look at him sharply, hunted around until he found the pin of the bomb and replaced it. No one would have known that the little Vermonter expected a bullet to smash into him at any moment.

As he replaced the pin he grinned a little with relief. He heard an excited jabber of voices coming from behind, with Ras Tefali's screaming above the rest. Apparently it had dawned on them that if they did kill Lyster there would be no one to handle the gun.

Before the palaver finished a loud cry came from high up where one of the scouts was stationed. Looking down the ravine, he saw a small group of men in khaki slowly appear clear of some rock. They were still far out of rifle or machine-gun range.

He noticed that they seemed to be waiting for the pilot to arrive. There was a council of war held—he saw through his glasses—and then the Italian guard moved slowly forward, while the pilot went on out of sight.

A moment later a small mountain battery appeared and they mounted a gun right before them.

Khan pulled his master's sleeve.

"Looky, master," he cried. "They're going to shoot at long range."

"That's all right, Khan," Lyster gritted. "We'll have to take it, that's all."

He released the pin which held the tripod and let it down to the ground. He crawled as close to the rocks as possible, motioning Khan to follow. There was no sign of the natives. Even his own guard had retreated behind some rocks.

Boom! Whing! Boom!

The first light shell exploded deafeningly far up behind them.

Boom! Whing! Bang!

Another shell, and it was over.

Whang. The sound was closer. He heard the whine of shrapnel all around.

Whang! whang! whang! Shell after shell arrived, to explode with deafening roar. As Lyster had said, they simply had to lie there and take it. Once in a while above the echo of the exploding shells could be heard the high-pitched scream of some wounded man.

Lyster grinned sardonically. There was one thing certain—the natives would fight like trapped rats now, for they would not dare come out in the open to get down that ravine to safety. Suddenly the firing stopped and Lyster slid stealthily over to the gun and once more raised the tripod to battle position.

The Italians were coming forward, confident that they had blasted out the opposition, as they had done time and time again in their steady advance.

Lyster saw Khan slide around to the place where the belt containing the bullets was feeding into the gun. He was grinning.

"Oh, master," he whispered, "those Italian dogs will learn that it is a great man against them now."

Lyster said nothing but squinted carefully along the sights, waiting—waiting.



IT did not take long for the Italians to appear. First there came a small column of men carrying light machine-guns. They proceeded cautiously forward and took up positions about six hundred yards from the barricade, thrusting their wicked looking weapons above odd stones along the side of the trail. Lyster thanked heaven he had given such strict orders to the natives not to open fire until the machine-gun started up, for that small column, if fired upon, would simply have retired and let more shells be thrown until they were sure the way was clear.

The smaller column was now followed by a larger group and it was this bunch

that Lyster wanted to get. He waited patiently as they slowly advanced. Quite clearly now he could see the lone officer in charge of the detachment. It was just a matter of time now until that one man was on the open sights of his gun.

At last the Italians were ready, for the group of machine guns opened up. A barrage of bullets scattered up the pass about two hundred yards behind the barricade. That was meant to cut off any retreat and also to stop any reinforcements from coming up.

Even Lyster had to admire the careful way that even the slightest advance had been thought out. As long as that hail of bullets was combing the pass behind they could not retreat, even if they wanted to. He grinned at that. If he couldn't retreat, neither could the natives. That meant that for the first time since the Italians had attacked they would have to stand and fight.

But wait—that officer was coming into his sights now. Lyster lifted the safety with his forefinger and put his right thumb forward on the trigger. His sights were directly on the middle of the officer, which meant that the group was covered. With a little sigh he pressed the trigger.

Rattetty-tat-tat. The slow, staccato beat of the Vickers gun drowned out all other sounds in the pass. Its bullets swept down on the helpless group of attackers who had been so carefully drawn into the open. With a savage yell, the natives also started to fire and hell broke loose.

One belt was gone and Lyster waited impatiently for Khan to shove the feed of the next one through. Even as he waited he knew it would never be needed on that group again, for they were practically all down. One or two had managed to take cover, but most of them showed as little blobs on the ground far down the pass.

"That'll teach them," he said savagely, "not to be so damn careless."

It did, for although the hail of bullets kept up relentlessly for the next few minutes not a single soul appeared in sight.

Lyster now directed the gun at the hidden machine-gunners. He knew exactly how and where they were hiding; and instead of firing directly at the stones, which would have wasted bullets, he aimed the gun at the rocky side of the pass just in front. He smiled as he saw a sudden movement. Their gun-fire slackened and became ragged. The Italians, of course, had not figured on the bullets striking off the rocks and finding unexpected targets.

Not only that, but the native snipers also had joined in, and as soon as a man appeared a hail of bullets struck him. In a very few minutes the machine-gun fire had stopped and the gunners were beating a hasty retreat down the pass, followed by the harrassing fire of the natives.

So far everything had gone according to Hoyle, and Lyster thought that with care they could hold the pass indefinitely, for that damn little *pom pom* could not do much damage. But his triumph was short-lived, for it dawned on him that probably the Italians would wait now till night and under cover of darkness make sudden sorties which would wreck his hopes of holding the pass. He knew by sad experience that the troops of the Emperor were not any good at night work against the Very lights which the Italians used to illumine the darkness.

Silence fell once more on the little pass as even the triumphant Ethiopians began to husband their ammunition.

Looking down the pass Lyster saw some solitary Italians come out and head towards the dead. Very apparently there were one or two wounded they wanted to fetch in from under the burning sun. Although the snipers fired, Lyster let them bring them in. He had been wounded once and left to die in a blazing sun, and so felt sympathy for the

brave Italians who dared to come out for their comrades.

Far above their heads two or three vultures appeared from nowhere and began to circle and circle.

Lyster's malaria came back on him now that the excitement had died. He tried to draw himself into the shade a little, while he waited for the next move.



SUDDENLY he heard a shuffle of sound behind him. Rolling over he glanced back. The Ethiopian officer who had wanted to kill him was sliding forward on his stomach, grinning triumphantly.

"It is so, *franchi*," he said, "that we have beaten them?"

Lyster nodded shortly. "Yea, a little," he admitted, as he tried to draw his sunburned body out of the sun.

The officer, still lying on the ground, grinned in triumph.

"We have decided to let you live, for you have done good work. I have sent back word that we have met the Italians and held them."

"Don't be so damn sure." Lyster grunted. "They won't take this lying down. They know there's only one gun here and they're going to do something about it."

He turned to look down the pass and then rubbed his head in bewilderment.

"Khan," he cried, "is it true that they are pulling that gun away?"

Khan also fastened his gaze down the pass. Sure enough, the Italians were manhandling the small mountain gun away.

Lyster rubbed his head wearily. Now why, he thought, are they doing that? Surely they aren't giving up?

The officer leaped to his feet.

"*Hulla hulla*," he cried, and then broke into gibberish of Amarik.

"They run. They are afraid we have beaten them."

Out of nowhere suddenly appeared three or four hundred heads. The men ran wildly down into the pass, brandish-

ing their rifles and even starting a war dance of triumph.

They had defeated the enemy, killed many and in general beaten the whole Italian army. But Lyster looked suspiciously down the pass. There was something wrong, he thought, something seriously wrong. Why under heaven would the Italians pull that gun away? If they were going to attack that night, why would they be so quick to pull out? He rubbed his aching head again.

Lyster turned to Ras.

"Listen, you," he said harshly, "these Italians, they do not run, they try something else. I would get my men back in those rocks. There's something wrong—wrong, I say."

But the officer only grinned.

"No," he answered, "the Italians they run like frightened pigs."

Lyster scanned the pass with searching, unbelieving eyes. Suddenly they fastened on a light glimmering far up the heights. That light was winking brightly in the noonday sun. Dot-dash-dot-dash-dot-dash.

Heliograph, he groaned. I wonder what under heaven those wops are going to do next.

He was not left long in doubt. From far above came the sullen buzz of many engines. The vultures disappeared. He tried to squint upwards to see what was going on but the sun was too bright.

He turned to the chief.

"Listen to me," he said. "Get those men under cover. Something is going to happen, see?" and he pointed towards the heavens.

Ras Tefali's face went a dirty gray. He also looked upward. The ominous sound was growing nearer. There was no doubt that a big Caproni bomber was coming.

Now what, mused Lyster, would I do if I were the Italians and wanted to clean this place out quick?

He looked up and down the rocky walls. Would they use gas? The answer

was no, because the gas would only stay in the bottom and not get the men hidden up the sides. Would they bomb? Little bombs wouldn't do any damage, but big ones—?

He looked up and down the sides and suddenly his face went serious. Why, good Lord, with large bombs this place was a death trap. If they dropped anywhere on the top it would knock in the sides of the canyon, throwing tons of rocks down on the hidden men. If they fell directly down, quite likely everything around would be killed with the terrific landlocked concussion. Lyster remembered the echoes with a sinking heart.

The planes were quite close and very apparently beginning already to dive for their objective.

"Listen you," he said to the officer, "we got to retreat, see? We got to get out of here."

"What?" Ras Tefali was astounded. "Do you mean run?"

Lyster nodded shortly.

The chief's face hardened. He looked up and down the sides of the rocky defile and could see nothing but safety here among the rocks. The only time he had seen planes in action was when he had been machine-gunned only a few days before. Ever since his one ambition had been to stay near rocks when aircraft were around.

He turned to Lyster.

"Look you," he said. "Your guard will shoot you down if you are afraid!"

Lyster's face went pale and he shook with anger.

"Say, you," he shouted, "I ain't afraid of your whole damn army, see, but I know when I'm licked and this is one of them. Let's get out."

"No."

"All right."

Lyster turned. Dismounting the gun with Khan's help, he pulled it into the safest place he could find.

By now the planes were only a few hundred feet above, circling, ever circling,

to get their sights on the objective. Suddenly even Ras Tefali realized that maybe this white man had good reason to be careful. These devil birds were bigger than any they had ever yet seen. Maybe he knew how they fought. It might be better to take his advice after all. He started to yell an order but it was never issued.

Wheee-bong! Wham-wham-wham!

Something struck Lyster like a blow, throwing him against the rocky sides of the little cave and knocking him senseless.

Khan, seeing his master down, crawled over to help him.

Wheee bong wheee bong—Khan fell over his master. Blood trickled slowly out of a hole in the back of his skull. There was no doubt what had happened to him. He was, at last, with his *houris* in Paradise.

Wheee-bong-wheee-bong-wheee-bong. A heavy pall of dust settled over the little defile. No other sound was to be heard except the terrific echoing of the bombs.

A huge pall of dust rose in the pass and blanketed the awful scene from view.

Twenty minutes later the terrific uproar died slowly down so that the roar of the Italian aircraft could be heard again. They had straightened into a V-shaped formation and apparently were starting home, well satisfied with their work.

Far down the pass a little group of Senegalese soldiers appeared and started confidently forward. They did not expect any opposition now.

When they reached the cloud of rocky dust they did not enter but sat casually down, clear of the glare of the sun, and waited patiently for it to settle. In the meantime more Italians came slowly forward and also sat down in the shade. They looked like nothing more than a group of men waiting for a train. No sound came out of the dust. Nothing. It was a veritable pall of death.



IT was nearly an hour before the dust settled enough for the Italian officer in charge of the Senegalese troops to order them ahead. He had fought at Caporetto in the great war and was reminded sharply of that affair when he looked at the pile of debris caused by the explosives. For the first time he realized just what large bombs could do in such an enclosed space, for although his men searched the debris and the stiff rocky sides of the gulch carefully, there was not a single living human being to be found.

Arms, legs, stuck out in all sorts of queer ways from the debris. Bits of ragged bloody cloth, with pieces of flesh attached, showed only too clearly how the mob of so-called soldiers had been smashed into pulp.

However, he was a conscientious man and ordered the search to go on. And that was how Lyster was finally found. A huge Senegalese, looking more for souvenirs and money than for living beings, pawed Khan over in an attempt to get a heavy signet ring from his hand. Underneath he came upon the dust-smearred face of Lyster.

He did not realize that he was a white man but merely looked upon him as another prospect for souvenirs. Searching his pockets, he came upon some letters, which he promptly took to the commanding officer for the expected reward.

When the latter, who could read English, saw the letters his tired face showed signs of life for the first time in several days.

"Take me to him," he said sharply to the soldier.

Grinning widely at so much importance being attached to his discovery, the Senegalese obeyed with alacrity.

Hastily the officer knelt down; still believing Lyster to be dead, he searched his body for more information. Putting his hands on the man's naked stomach to search for his money belt (which was usually hidden under his khaki shorts)

he felt signs of life and hastily ordered the still body to be carried clear.

Farther down the pass a detachment of the Medical Corps, under the command of a doctor, waited impatiently for more business. It arrived in the shape of Lyster.

Five minutes later the latter was sitting dazedly up, the strong fumes of aromatic spirits of ammonia filling the air.

He saw the black-eyed Italian officer looking down at him, his eyes masked of all emotion.

"Are you better, *signor?*" the officer asked.

"Yeah, much better," responded Lyster. His dazed eyes took in the dust which was settling everywhere, and he managed to smile a little wearily. "That is one more lesson learned," he managed. "Never get a detachment of men in a place with rocky sides."

The Italian did not smile.

Somehow that lack of response brought a cold chill of fear to Lyster's heart. He staggered to his feet. His dazed mind tried to grasp the sense of impending danger that hung very close to him. What the hell was it about being caught by the Italians? Oh yes, Mussolini had issued orders that any white man caught with the Ethiopian army was to be shot on sight, that was it. He tried to laugh it off. Why, good Lord, Mussolini couldn't mean that. Why, he was a prisoner of war just the same as anybody else. He simply could not mean it.

He decided to find out. Trying to smile weakly at the officer, he remarked:

"Well, I guess I'm hooked up for the duration, eh?"

The Italian's face was still grim.

"You know our orders," he said, "White man!" The last two words were fairly spat out. "I should have known that defense could not have been organized by the Ethiopians. That flying officer didn't stop to tell me about it."

Suddenly Lyster remembered the man

whose life he had saved. Well, by gosh, come to think about it, that fellow should do something. After all, hadn't he got him away from the torture of the blacks? What about that?

He looked over at the officer with new confidence.

"You mentioned the pilot. It was me who let him go. I saved him from torture. I suppose that should let me out, eh?"

The officer shrugged his shoulders.

"No. Your defense of the canyon has held up our advance. It will take two days to clear the pass. The world will laugh at our delay. You have caused the lives of an officer and fifty men to be lost with your machine-gun. The order will be carried out." Then as he saw Lyster sway with weakness, he added, "Have a drink?"

"A drink? Why yes!"

Lyster took hold of the proffered water bottle and put it to his lips. It contained rum. Knowing now that death was certain, he took a good long drink. At least, he thought, the Italians are human, anyway. Feeling a little better he handed the water bottle back.

The officer continued: "It is the policy of our government not to allow black soldiers to shoot a white man, even if he is an enemy. You will be taken back to the mule train, where there is a regiment of Fascists, and they will shoot you."

Lyster was astounded to hear himself say quite coolly:

"Thank you, but really if I am to be shot I don't care a damn who does it."

But the officer was not listening. He had already turned and was motioning to a huge Sengalese sergeant to take the prisoner down the line.

Before Lyster quite realized what was happening he found himself marching between two stolid rows of blacks to the mule train, where he would be shot by white men instead of black. In spite of himself, he had to grin. Mussolini, he

thought, had certainly taken care of everything.

Evening was beginning to fall and the canyon was a little cooler than it had been when the sun was beating directly down. Lyster knew by sad experience that a little later he would be actually suffering from the cold. His blood, thinned by the tropical sun and malaria, was not acclimatized to the rarer cooler air of the high altitude in which they were.



SOMEHOW the idea of death, now that it was certain, wasn't so appalling.

The emperor would have lost on the deal, or had he? Maybe the two days delay would be worth far more than the money which had already been sent home to his wife, so perhaps that was all right.

The thought of his wife made him feel better. It was four long years now since Lyster had been home. The depression had ended all chances of getting another comfortable job like the one he had held immediately before he started for South America as a soldier of fortune.

The money he got was good, and he in turn had given excellent service, being promoted to general in the Bolivian army. Later he had gone to China, where he had been promoted to the rank of colonel. He had made a specialty of machine-guns and had even assisted in the defense of Shanghai with the Christian army of Wu. All that was over now, he thought wearily, and I will soon join poor old Khan.

It was dark when they arrived at the main line, with the result that his execution had to be held over until the morning. He was closely watched by a Fascist guard who made sure that he was as comfortable as possible, giving him both cigarettes and wine, and thus he awaited the dawn.

After awhile he became sleepy, and his guards were surprised to see the doomed man lie down and sleep like a child

under the covering of as many blankets as he could pile on.

Just before dozing off he said to the officer—

"This is the first time I have been warm at night since the bloody campaign started."

After this surprising remark the officer who was to carry out the execution went and stared moodily into the darkness.

They woke him at dawn. Lyster yawned and actually smiled. At the same time his active mind, more rested now than it had been in days, gauged the possibilities of escape. One glance showed the hopelessness of it, however, for already the camp was teeming with activity. Quite clearly he could see two skirmish lines and there were probably many more.

When he stood up the officer came over and handed him a bottle of brandy. That was to be the mercy drink, of course. He turned to the man after the drink and said:

"Say, you, if you guys had been offering enough money I would sooner have worked for you than the King of Kings. He simply ain't in it as far as comfort is concerned."

The officer did not smile, nor did his firing party. One of its youngest members became violently sick at the stomach instead and was unable to carry on.

After a moment the officer motioned to Lyster to fall in. Surrounded by the numbed guard, they marched him toward the side of the canyon where the rock wall made a convenient stop for the bullets. He was placed against the rock and the officer, revolver ready for the mercy shot, offered him a handkerchief which he brushed away.

Already an N.C.O. had placed the firing squad in position. The officer took up a position a little to one side.

Lyster, naked to the waist and still covered with the scum and dust of battle, noted with suddenly clarified eyes that most of the guard were trembling.

Very apparently these Italians hadn't got used to war yet.

The officer raised his handkerchief; the N.C.O. issued a hoarse command. Rifles were raised very unsteadily.

The officer took over now and apparently told them in Italian that when the handkerchief dropped they were to fire.

Lyster thought very dreamily of his wife and that young officer whose life he had saved yesterday. He wondered dimly where he was now. As the rifles came up, he stiffened his body against the impact of the bullets.

Glancing sideways, he saw the officer look hastily towards him. His face was white with horror. Poor devil, Lyster thought, he will never forget this. He noticed very clearly that he had his revolver out. He was glad to see that, for it showed that he did not intend to let him suffer any longer than necessary, if those six bullets did not actually kill.

He gave one last look at the earth and sky. The sun, a red ball of fire, was just beginning to show over the mountains. On his right and left was the myriad activity of an army preparing for another day. He saw a motorcycle rider riding like fury. He wondered where the man could be going in such a hurry. Maybe the emperor had got his army ready and was attacking at that moment. Well, he would never know. He tried to spit but no saliva came.

He turned slowly back to face the firing party and contorted his face into a grin.

He waited.

Slowly the handkerchief was released from the officer's hand.

The N.C.O. shouted "Fire" hoarsely.
Bang—bang—bang!

It was a very ragged volley indeed.

Lyster stiffened sharply, as if suddenly remembering something, and then slowly slumped to the ground.

One of the firing party dropped his rifle and burst into a moan like a child.

The others very slowly brought their rifles to the ground. The officer braced himself and, walking as stiffly as an Airedale dog, made his way to the loose heap on the ground.

Slowly, slowly he bent down. At the same moment he noticed that there were three white splotches on the rocks, which meant that some of the party had missed completely.

A sharp sigh escaped him. The man was not dead.

One bullet had smashed his leg, another torn through his shoulder and another broken his right arm.

His face went ghastly under the tropical tan.

"*Madre di Dio!*" he said. "*Madre di Dio!*" and raised his automatic.

Suddenly the roar of a motorcycle broke the stillness.

"Stop—wait—stop—in the name of Il Duce!" a voice cried.

The officer turned. A man in the uniform of the Flying Corps was running rapidly toward him, waving a paper.

"Stop! Stop!" he cried. "A reprieve. Is he dead?"

"No, he is not dead," said the officer slowly, and wondered if it was the sun that made him feel so queer.

The newcomer was quite close now. He was young, dark and vibrant with excitement.

"See, *signor*, this man saved my life

yesterday, so I hurried right back to the airdrome and flew to Eritrea, where the commanding general himself signed an order to extradite him to America. Will he live?"

"He will live with care," said the officer stolidly.

"I knew they would capture him, I knew they would. That is why I did not bother to stop to tell them about the defense of the barricade. But I got the order and now he is free.

"With care he will live," said the officer in charge of the firing party and was amazed at the quick way his stomach seemed to feel better.

"Then he shall have care, he shall have the best of attention. The care that only a nephew of Il Duce himself can give." And the pilot waved for help.

The officer in charge of the firing party stiffened with surprise.

"A nephew of Il Duce," he stuttered, and immediately gave the Fascist salute.

The airman bent down over Lyster, who slowly opened his eyes. He recognized the officer at once and smiled weakly.

"I knew you would come back," he said, "I just knew you'd come." Once more he relapsed into unconsciousness.

The firing party were astounded to see a man who called himself a nephew of Il Duce lift up the condemned man and gently carry him away.

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THE AVENGER

fifth of six parts

By Gordon Young

(The story so far)

Sidi Hamet, corsair of Tripoli, had good reasons for not wanting his daughter to marry the sultan who had demanded her hand. Once in the Turk's power, he would lose the very freedom he had fled England to find. And in another Englishman, a rebellious galley slave and one of his own captives, he saw a chance for escape.

Soon after the sultan's demand, the daughter, Mariuma, was spirited away from Tripoli in boy's garb, and at her side was the slave, who now called himself, Mister Herrack. At Genoa the wily Hamet had a ship manned and ready for the fleeing pair.

But Mariuma had escaped one enemy only to find a greater one. Soon after clearing Gibraltar their ship was attacked by the *Maddalena*, captained by Ripaudi, hireling of the notorious Piombo family of merchant princes. After a bloody encounter, Ripaudi's men boarded and scuttled the smaller ship and Herrack and his charge were taken prisoner.

The girl saved Herrack's life by convincing Ripaudi that her father would pay heavy ransom, and Herrack, because of his aid in checking a mutiny and his mastery of seamanship, was made boat-swain's mate.

Had Ripaudi but known, Herrack was far from being an ally of the Piombos, re-

gardless of the circumstances. He had seen his sister sold into slavery by one of that family; his trail of revenge had been halted only by his capture and imprisonment. Now there seemed to be a way out, and a way that would not violate Herrack's pledge to Hamet. Herrack incited the *Maddalena's* crew to attack a Spanish galleon over Ripaudi's protest, hoping to lead them to destruction. But the unforeseen happened; the mad foray succeeded—the Spaniard was at their mercy!

However profits the rich booty brought to Venice, it boded no good to Herrack. Ripaudi, doubly stung by being virtually shorn of power and by the knowledge that his judgment had been at fault, plotted against Herrack's life, and the latter foiled a murderous attack by sheer chance, just as the *Maddalena* was swinging in triumph into the port of Zara.

There, having escaped from the ship, Herrack met the woman who had taken Ripaudi from the shadow of the gibbet and had made him a mighty captain. Magda, a woman of many loves and great influence. Furious at what she believed to be Ripaudi's infidelity with Mariuma, she summoned Herrack to a conference in which she commanded him to kill Ripaudi—a welcome order.

Before the meeting broke up, however, bravos broke into the house and Herrack



had an opportunity to prove that his bid for loyalty was not undeserved. Overpowering the killers, Herrack faced the last one, the leader, and discovered that his trail from the ship had not been blind as he had thought. For the man with whom he grappled was high in the enemy councils—a cutthroat in the pay of the Piombos!

CHAPTER XVII

(CONTINUED)

 **CROOK-NOSE**, having an injured arm, was not able to open the heavy door quickly; now, cornered, he turned and held the dagger's hilt against his breast, ready to slash.

Herrack swung a fist. The feint made Crook-nose dodge and shift the dagger. Herrack grabbed the wrist, straightened out the arm with a jerk that loosened

the dagger. It fell to the carpet. Crook-nose went limp, screamed:

"In God's name, have mercy! Don't break this arm, too!"

Herrack held the arm straight out, as if any moment to snap it across his knee. "The Magnificent sent you!"

"No, no, he's not in Zara!"

"You lie. I saw him myself!"

"B-but you couldn't!"

"I did. He lifted his mask to scratch his nose in the Turks' Death tavern! Where is he now?"

Crook-nose went so limp he fell back against the door.

Herrack pulled off the mask and struck him across the face with calloused palm. "When I ask questions, 'tis best to answer! Where is he?"

Crook-nose's anguished "I do not know" had almost an honest sound. "He came to Zara secretly to—" He stopped with a startled look, as if suddenly remembering what he must not say.

This time it seemed his forearm was not being broken but was being twisted off; he went to his knees.

"Oh, God's name! I'll tell—Count Grimani's daughter—I can't stand it—he loves—secretly from Venice—"

"He loves women only as a dog loves a bone! Where is he now?"

"I cannot know, because—"

"Ho, you mean won't tell!"

The first twitch of pain set Crook-nose in a frantic blabber:

"He sails for Venice in a friend's ship at midnight. Affairs of state. 'Tis given out in Venice that he is confined by illness. Tonight, when young Agnolo found and told him of you and Magda—"

"And you showed your arm and added your voice?"

"— he said to find and—and—the fault is not mine! I have served the Magnificent for years and must obey!"

"How many years?"

"Since we were youths."

"Ten years?"

"Longer!"

"Ah, so!" Herrack pushed him back against the wall. "So you have helped with his crimes for ten years, Crook-nose?"

"My name is Gratti, *signior*."

Herrack picked up the dagger, ran a thumb over the steel. The blade tip had been rasped with a file. "Signior Gratti goes masked to break into houses! Strangles old women! Sets assassins on men! Uses poison on his dagger! You do indeed seem fit to serve the Magnificent Piombo of Venice! In the closest trust, perhaps?"

Gratti swallowed, nodded a little.

"I'll make a test. If that be so, then, Signior Gratti, give me the name of that woman your Piombo poisoned some years ago so that he might have a dead English woman's body to bury as that of Lady Elizabeth, whom he sold to Turks!"

"H-how can y-you know of that!"

"Tell me!"

"Mercy of God, *signior*! I know not! Her name—oh, God! It was so long ago—her name—I never knew her name! He found her in a sailor's tavern. Gave her fine clothes, money and—"

"Poison!"

"Poison, yes, *signior*. But how can you know of that?" He almost swallowed his tongue in astonishment.

"To what Turk did he sell the Lady Elizabeth?"

"She was given to his uncles here in Zara and they—it was they who made arrangements. But h-how can you know?"

"How? The Devil himself doesn't know your Piombo better than I. He loves, you say, Count Grimani's daughter? Not so! He came secretly to woo and win her? I'll tell you why! If he can drag her into open scorn as a discarded mistress, the shame and sorrow of it will kill Count Grimani. He and you bravos fear the old admiral's face. Ha! I'm glad that we have met, Signior Gratti!"

Herrack took him by the neck, pushed him across the hall to where Magda crouched in a huddle, pressing Quella's wrinkled old face against her cheek.

Toothless, withered old Quella squinted through a fox-cautious eye, then sat up, coughed, fingered her ropy neck, demanded wine and began swearing.

Crook-nosed Gratti, coming alone into the entrance before the door, had presented from under his cloak a carefully wrapped parcel that looked rich. Plausibly and in humbleness he had offered it as a messenger from certain of Donna Magda's admirers. Quella, always greedy, had unbolted the door. Gratti had blocked its closing with an out-thrust leg and other men had rushed from the darkness, forced their way through and tried to stop her screams by throttling her. Then Gratti had stabbed her.

Quella had scarcely more of a body than a lean rat, but she wore much clothing and the flounces of her many

colored petticoats gave her a certain bulkiness. The vanity of a crone who had once been beautiful had caused Quella to swell her breast with padding, and the dagger had cut harmlessly into cloth, but Quella had played dead.

Magda chanted praise. She hugged and kissed and fondled the evil-faced old woman, who glared at Crook-nosed Gratti and said terrible things.

Herrack asked bluntly, with no inkling of preference in his tone:

"What do you choose, Donna Magda? Will you send word to the captain of the night watch and make complaint of our friend Crook-nose? Or shall I throw him into a closet, carry away his dead friends, and make the most of silence? Tomorrow, if questioned, we all will swear never to have seen him."

Magda had toddled in and out of wine shops when a babe, and so from childhood had seen much blood spilled. Growing tall, she had been the cause of quarrels. Brawls and murders were common. Venice needed swords and bravos had them. Between campaigns they served the feuds of lordly houses, often openly as liveried servants.

Magda pressed a thumb nail to her lower front teeth and frowned at Gratti. "But why does he live?"

Old Quella echoed the question with savage muttering.

"I have use for him," said Herrack.

"You make very free with our house!" Quella snapped.

For that, instantly, Magda slapped her. "It is my house! I have not complained!" To Herrack, "Do as you like!"

Herrack put a hand to the back of Gratti's neck and took him to the wine cellar. Quella stood by, holding a candle, grumbled fretfully, worked her thin lips in and out over her gums, and looked very much like an angered witch.

Herrack thrust Gratti into the cellar darkness, gave no word of warning or hope, but snapped the lock and put the ponderous key into his own pocket.



JEHAN, looting the pockets of dead men, found one alive. He yelled and Herrack came.

The man staggered to his feet before Herrack. He was a small, dark fellow, had a thin face, frayed hose, worn shoes, and raveled silver braid on his sleeves. Blood dripped from the matted hair at the back of his head, oozed from the gash in his breast.

Herrack asked, "What of tonight?"

The small man said, "Signior Gratti offered us employment. We were not told it was to fight the Devil!"

"Have you served that Crook-nose before?"

The small man hesitated, but admitted, "Yes, signior. Once."

"His pay?"

"Two ducats for a man who was smothered under a cloak and carried to a gondola. That was some ten days ago."

"For tonight?"

"We were promised five ducats each, signior."

"What is your name?"

"Matteo."

"You may have your five ducats, Matteo, if you will tell how you knew to look for me in this house. Sit on this stool. Jehan, bring wine."

Matteo said, "Thank you, signior," and sat on the hall stool Herrack pushed toward him.

Jehan said, "Wine? For him?"

"Wine for him."

Jehan groaned, threw up his arms, said, "Madman Englishman!" then ran, the sooner to be back and not miss the recital.

"Signior Gratti gathered us out of a wine shop to look for you! He entered one tavern after another and peered about while we waited outside. He had gone along the whole quay and through side streets and returned from each tavern swearing worse than before. At last he began to revisit those where he had searched. Then near the Death of the Turks he saw you and this youth

hurrying along the street. We followed. When you came into this house he said it was Donna Magda's and bade us wait and set upon you if you came out before he returned. He went away somewhere and had a parcel made up in a way that tempted the old woman to open the door."

Matteo drank the wine. Herrack fingered his beard, asked:

"Is your sword for sale?"

Matteo gave back the wine cup to Jehan, moved his left hand slowly, touched his right breast. "My sword arm is useless."

"The wounds of brave men heal quickly."

Matteo stood up, bowed. "I thank you, *signior*."

Down in the kitchen Quella spat and mumbled reproaches. Jehan bit his tongue, groaned, wagged his head with upward roll of eyes. Magda frowned doubtfully, shifting her stare from the pinch-faced little bravo to Herrack, who washed Matteo's wounds and dressed them with hot olive oil and salt.

Matteo clenched his teeth; now and then his eyes popped with a wild look of pain, and twice he said, "Oh Jesus!" but made no other sound. Herrack was not a gentle nurse.

Later, when Matteo was put into an upstairs bed, Herrack told the three of them:

"Would you have me cut his throat to stop his tongue? I'll not do it!"

"There's the cellar!" Quella snapped. "Good oil and salt! Pah!"

Salt was costly, being a state monopoly of Venice.

"You hire an assassin that barely failed to murder you!" Jehan put a hand to his face, groaned.

"That he tried to kill me means nothing, since he was hired and had no hate. That he tried bravely means much! His sword's for sale. I've bought it."

He carried the three dead men, one after the other, down the stairs and

through the kitchen. Each was wrapped with many folds of black cloth, that there might be no tell-tale dripping of red stain to bring *custodi* sniffing in the morning.

Herrack carried a black burden and Jehan went along as guide. They moved cautiously through dark, winding streets that led to the unlighted water's edge. Three times they went out and back. Three times there were quiet splashes in the dead black water that lispied and whispered along the quay wall, as if saying it had often thus taken men's dark secrets and kept them well.



THE next morning, when wine was to be drawn for breakfast, Herrack went down the steps, candle in hand, to unlock the door and stand by, so that the crook-nosed prisoner would not be troublesome while Quella filled her pitcher.

There was a stale, vinegary smell. The candle fluttered its light over dark barrels and racked bottles. Gratti lay on the floor.

Herrack went nearer, held down the candle. Gratti was dead, with his own dagger in his breast. There was no sign of struggle. He had been drunk when murdered.

"Who did it?" Herrack turned and put the candle near Quella's face.

"God is my witness, *signior*, I know not!" Her wrinkled, toothless face twisted into a pious smirk.

Herrack looked hard at her; then he set down the candle on a cask's head, caught her to him, ran his hand about her waist, fumbling. She pretended to think he meant something she knew he did not and simpered in mild struggling:

"Oh, sir! At my age!"

From the folds of the girdle he brought up a big key, looked at it, tossed it back. The key struck against her skirt and clanked to the floor.

Herrack drew a deep breath. "All

right. So be it, Quella." He was not angered.

"You forgive me, *signior*?" she whined.

"Draw the wine."

"And, if you please, do not mention to Donna Magda that there is a second key. At my age, *signior*, a poor weak body must have good rich wine. These foolish young girls drink only for pleasure and do not know that we who are old must use wine for blood. You will not tell her, *signior*?"



EARLY the next morning Herrack went to the house of Saransetta the Jew.

It was a narrow house, shuttered, and stood in a dark, crooked street. Herrack beat the knocker. It rang with a hollow sound, as if on the door of an empty house. An eye peered motionless through a peep-hole and a solemn voice asked, "Why do you disturb the peace of this house as such an hour?"

"I have gold and jewels to sell."

"Who am I to buy riches? Do you mock my poverty?"

"Donna Magda gave me your name."

After the clank of bolts, rattle of chains, the door opened a few inches.

Herrack stooped and could barely squeeze through. He came into a dark hall and faced the stoop-shouldered figure of a lean, bearded man whose complexion was yellowishly pale.

Saransetta showed the way into a bare room on the first floor, where an ill-smelling lamp burned before an open account book. The old man murmured woefully about the evils of the day, losses, taxes, unprofitable ventures.

Herrack clapped down a handful of jewels, some loose, some in gold settings. They rolled and bounced like timid things seeking to hide.

Here was great value. The old Jew's hands trembled above them. "No, no, I cannot buy them! I am a poor man.

What do you ask? But 'tis useless to name a price. I do not traffic in jewels. Only in spices. I am a poor spice merchant and times are bad."

"You waste your craft in trying to bargain, Saransetta. There is no haggling here. These jewels are yours if you so much as say that you can reach the ears of Sidi Hamet, Renegado of Tripoli, and—"

"I?" The old Jew looked aghast and outraged. "I, deal with a Moor! Never!" He fluttered the hands in dismissal, drew back, shaking his head. "And you say the gentle Donna Magda sent you? No. Why these jewels must be worth a hundred ducats!"

"Ten hundred were nearer."

"Yes, yes. Most likely. But I know nothing of jewels. I cannot deal in them. A message, you say? I am not sure, but I believe my cousin at Ragusa knows of a man at Malta who sometimes trades with Moors. What message did you say?"

"That Edward Herrack and his companion were captured at sea by the corsair Ripaudi and brought to Zara. That Herrack, being not far from friends, will reach England yet and not alone; but that Sidi Hamet must be prepared to pay in full the Grand Turk's price for an empty coffin!"

Saransetta's eyebrows lifted quizzically. "An empty coffin?"

"'Tis a word of meaning between us."

The Jew nodded, plucked his beard. "No, I can't. It is so very hard to get furtive words into a Moorish port unless one knows the secret agents. Spies and enemies accuse even the innocent and—"

"There is a certain Pistario of Genoa who—"

"Who is dead," Saransetta said calmly.

"Ah! How so?"

"Plague, poison, a dagger or his own gluttony? I do not know, but he is dead. It is said about the Porta Marini, where merchants talk together, that this Pistario was suspected of selling the Piom-

bos' secrets to Moors. But I have no dealings with Piombos or Moors and so know nothing."

Herrack put his knuckles on the table, leaned over it. "Then no word has reached Zara of the fate of Ugo Piombo and his ship that voyaged with a great cargo of silks, carpets, fine leathers to London?"

tions of the Piombos. I think much ill fortune hovers over the house."

Saransetta put his hands on the table, leaned far across. His voice was solemn. "Tell me why you say that! If I find the reason good, I swear by the God of Israel that your message will reach Sidi Hamet as fast as a ship can sail! The Piombos? That evil family that has



"None. London is far away. Do you know of some misfortune?" Saransetta tried to veil his eagerness.

"In a way, yes." Herrack indifferently began to push the jewelry into a huddle. "The last time I saw him he looked in such ill health I doubt if he lived long thereafter. In fact, were I a merchant, a man who handled money and looked for profit, I would secretly buy up all the discounted bills, notes and obliga-

prospered without honor, without honesty, without courage—misfortune at last? What do you know of Ugo Piombo?"

Herrack stared, not sure; he said boldly:

"His ship was captured, looted, burned by Moors. I was in chains as bow oarsman on the galley that first boarded. Ugo Piombo is dead. I saw him die!"

Saransetta raised face and hands. "Ah,

at last God's justice comes!" He caught Herrack's arm. "Do not speak of it to anyone in Zara! I will send your message to Sidi Hamet. It will leave the city before nightfall. The Piombos at last—at last—"

CHAPTER XVIII

"TAKE ME TO GRIMANI!"



IT was near noon when Herrack left the Jew's house and went toward the sea. The sun was bright. Here and there children played with tireless shrieking that was half laughter, some women gossiped, and old sailors drowsed in spots of shade. In midday most people kept within doors.

A sailor off the *Maddalena* ran at Herrack with the hurrying of one whose search is ended. He blurted, "All this morning Ser Cado Mosto has sent men to find you. You are to come to his house on an affair of great importance. And I am to have a ducat for finding you!"

"What's to windward?"

"It has to do with our maid of Tripoli. It is said Captain Ripaudi has become a madman who has eaten a half of his own beard! His eyes are frozen and he breathes curses on you and her! To curse her, he is surely mad!"

"You are a pleasant messenger. Here is another ducat for your good news! Show me to the house."

When Herrack faced him, Cado Mosto found it hard to speak. Herrack could have dangled a half dozen Cado Mostos under his arms and clacked their heads together; but he came upon Herrack as if rageful enough to strike. His wrinkled lips twitched and moved before he spoke; then a small hand darted out of a long sleeve and he leveled an accusing finger. His voice was choking. . .

The night before, on board the *Maddalena*, amid all the stir and staring in the cabin, with Piombo and his friends

arching their backs and licking lips before her, Lilla Mariuma sat as rigidly as wax and did not speak. Her eyes searched wine-flushed faces with furtive anxiety. Those who noticed thought it was the natural timidity of a girl held prisoner among strangers, some of whom lifted glasses frequently.

After the quarrel with Magda, Ripaudi whispered to Mariuma that this Magda was nothing but a fisher girl in a fine gown. However, Ripaudi was deeply troubled by the purse of Georgius.

In the midst of the babble, in came a strutting messenger who wore the count's livery. He said with as much hauteur as an herald:

"Ser Filippo Grimani, Count of Zara, has heard that the daughter of Sidi Hamet, Renegado of Tripoli"—here he looked hard at Mariuma—"is among the prisoners and he commands that she be brought to him immediately!"

Therewith he swung his cape about his shoulders, turned sharply and went out with as proud an air as a rooster that has won a cock fight. Count Grimani, sailor and soldier, belonged to the faction that desperately opposed any party the Piombos supported.

Fear blubbered on many mouths when his message was delivered. 'Twas said that most likely he meant to seize the daughter of Sidi Hamet as a ward of the signiory. The Renegado's importance was almost kingly. With her as hostage, Venice could compel the greatest of Moorish corsairs to give the ships of Venice safe passage. Her ransom value might be diverted into a mere treaty.

Piombo smugly reassured their fears. The friends of the Magnificent nephew were already in full control of sea affairs, would soon dominate even the signiory; whereupon her ransom value would be extortionately combined with any treaty. However much malice Grimani might have, he could do no harm; and it would be very like a triumph to appear before

him, present Sidi Hamet's daughter and tell of how the Piomboian *Maddalena*, under the command of brave Captain Ripaudi, had captured not only the Renegado's ship, manned by Englishmen, but also the great Spanish pirate that had attacked the *Maddalena*.

"Good fortune never deserts the Piombos!" The bright eyes of the old merchant glistened. Many other people said it was the Devil who never deserted a Piombo!

Instantly all was again pleasant hum and babble. Cado Mosto's thin, wrinkled lips twitched in self-laudatory smiles. Ripaudi's finger tips flourished the ends of his mustache as he foresaw himself praised and honored. His angered perplexity forgot even Magda and that purse given to Georgius for work undone.

Mariuma submissively said not one word.

Something of a procession formed ashore at the landing place near the palace, with link boys and serving men crowding to see, and the merchants pushing to be by Piombo's side. Ripaudi did not forget that the torchlight was on his face and that a crowd was staring.

This night Count Grimani was giving a ball in honor of Señor Esparato of the Spanish Embassy at Venice, and by way of novelty and interest admitted the Piombo party into the hall where fine ladies and lords danced.

At once there was a flutter of voices and an eager edging forward with rustle of stiff brocades and click of high slippers to see this daughter of the great Renegado. Ladies said at once with accents of disappointment. "Oh, I do not think she is beautiful!"

The gentlemen understood perfectly what they meant. Mariuma had hair like flaming gold. Her proud, small face was shaped with firm delicacy. Her tawny eyes were beautiful, intelligent and seemed a little timid, but their look was as direct as a bird's. When her eyes

found Count Grimani they did not leave his face.



COUNT GRIMANI was a tall old man; his large, crafty face wore a cautious expression, as if ever on the alert. He had much wisdom in worldly affairs and had battled from his youth on land and sea as well as in the turbulent warfare of Venetian statecraft. His utterly unselfish and combative devotion to Venice, like that of other members of her lordly houses, was far greater than to God. A spread of carefully trimmed gray beard covered his throat. He wore great jewels and there was much gold work on his garments. He sat in a tall chair that had carved arms and was placed on a dais.

Ripaudi advanced. His proud bearing, for all the richness of velvet and uplift of falcon face, still had something that marked him in their eyes as a bravo. He assumed a proprietary attitude over Mariuma, but Cado Mosto and old Piombo also maintained proprietary claims by giving supporting gestures and touches, as if she were unused to walking.

All of them made low bows, excepting Mariuma, who fixed her gaze on the deep, wise eyes of Count Grimani. Old Piombo ducked and bobbed as if he kept count and must go through a certain number of salutations. The Piombos were a rich family and powerful, but the Grimani were enrolled on the golden book of Venice.

Cado Mosto had an air of stealthy reverence as he moved to get near enough to be the one to answer questions.

Count Grimani took no more notice of them than if they were lackeys. He looked only at the girl.

"You, my child, are the daughter of Sidi Hamet, the famous corsair of Tripoli?"

Mariuma answered with wavering shake of head. "No, I am not!"

A plop of astonished murmurs filled the hall. Count Grimani lifted his shaggy brows.

Mariuma leaned forward; all in a hurried breath she said, "Oh, sir, I am nobody at all but the runaway daughter of Ibn el Toiffel, a date merchant of Tripoli!"

Ripauidi's oath burst explosively. "Blood of Christ! Five wounds of God! Toiffel? Date—merchant!"

Old Piombo and Cado Mosto popped open their mouths with much the look of trying to see which could gasp the longer.

Then titters and little delighted squeaks of laughter ran through the press of fine ladies and gentlemen.

"B-b-b-but—" Piombo stammered.

"But Your Excellency!" gasped Cado Mosto in amazed anguish.

Count Grimani leaned forward on the arm of his chair. "Speak on, child!" His voice was kindly, his manner reassuring, but his eyes narrowed with hawk-like watchfulness.

"Oh, sir, a high wall runs between the great garden of Sidi Hamet and my poor father's little place for flowers, but there are chinks in the wall—"

The hush was so silent that not even the satins of the ladies rustled and whispered.

"—and I saw the Englishman, who was treated with so much honor by the great Sidi Hamet while he waited the coming of ransom. And I was wicked enough to let my veil fall when I knew he gazed toward me from the house top in the moonlight. The moonlight of Tripoli is like morning in other parts of the world!

"And we soon were meeting in the shadows of my father's garden, for the highest wall is nothing for him to leap over! He could not live without me and I would not live without him!

"When his ransom was paid and he went away, I went with him in the rags of a little street boy. And at Genoa,

because he is a great man of the sea and had been master of ships, an English merchant gave him command of a ship that was going to England.

"But at sea these men set upon us like a big dog upon one that is small! But, sir, he had almost captured their own ship, the *Maddalena*, for he did not try to run away, but grappled and set fire to his own and boarded the *Maddalena*!"

The eyes of Count Grimani, sailor and soldier, grew brighter. Listening ladies caught their breath in ecstatic gasps.

"But their numbers were too great! When he was defeated and made prisoner, I stood by in boy's clothes that were filled with my mother's jewels, for I had not wanted to come to him dowerless! And I beseeched Allah to help me save him and to save myself from these ferocious men!

"And Allah put it into my mind to say that I was Lilla Mariuma, the daughter of Sidi Hamet! And I scattered my mother's jewels—" She flung her hand in playful disdain—"as if I were the child of the great Sidi Hamet and such precious trinkets were nothing of value at all!

"And though this man—" she meant Ripauidi—"and this man, too—" a fleeting gesture indicated the bewildered Cado Mosto—"had heard that Lilla Mariuma was but lately dead, still they believed me, because Allah put it into my mind to them I know not what story, but something very untrue and silly about how Sidi Hamet had only pretended that his daughter was dead because he wanted to keep her from marrying the Sultan! And these men believed that the great Sidi Hamet, who is afraid of no one on the sea or earth, had given his daughter into the keeping of an infidel Englishman—"

Loud laughter broke through the hall. Anybody that had a look at Piombo's face must have laughed. Even Count Grimani smiled. Ripauidi forgot in whose

presence he stood and swore most horribly, turning on Mariuma such a look of fury that Count Grimani's words were angered and stern:

"Stand back and keep silent!"



MARIUMA came very near to Count Grimani's chair, stooped to her knees. Her small hands fluttered timidly.

"Please," she gasped as if all out of breath with fear, "now that they are angered, do not let me remain in their keeping! They will do me harm, because now they know there will be no great ransom at all, for I am only the daughter of a date seller and my poor father curses the day I was born to love an infidel! But this Edward Herrack, whom I love, has more than repaid them for the loss of my ransom!"

"It was he who suppressed a mutinous outbreak when their own sailors tried to take the *Maddalena*. He fought down their sailors as a man whips dogs, because he knew they would harm me! And it was he who led the attack on the great Spanish galleon and captured it—"

"Spanish galleon!"

The tall, dark Señor Esparato, in whose honor the brilliant ball had been given, said with punctilious hauteur:

"May I ask Your Excellency to inquire the name of the Spanish galleon, and upon what pretext it was attacked, boarded, plundered, by Venetian *pirates*?"

That word "*pirates*" was like a glove's slap across Grimani's face, and was so meant. There was much stealthy hatred between Spain and Venice—it was soon to culminate in the notorious Spanish plot—but as civilized people do, they lied to each other, pretended a suspicionless friendship, exchanged charming courtesies, even while fingering in the dark for each other's throats.

Grimani knew that few things could be more pleasing to Señor Esparato than a perfectly authenticated instance

of Venetian piracy. The cost of Spain's greatest ship was almost worth it.

As soon as the word "*pirates*" had been spoken, old Piombo pitched up his fat hands in wheezy horror and drew back from Ripaudi as from a plague victim, stammered reproach and amazement.

Cado Mosto was all a-tremble and itching to get in some words that might save his neck. "I forbade the attack! I protested! I did everything in my power but this—this creature—" he poked out a wrinkled hand at Mariuma—"proclaimed herself the prophetess of Tripoli and incited the crew with a prediction of certain victory—"

Mariuma cried with a rush of words, "It was such a great ship and so covered with men and soldiers that I was certain that it would capture the *Maddalena*! And I would rather have been anywhere on earth than longer among these cruel men, for he—" she turned on Ripaudi—"threatened to cut out the heart of my lover and tie it about my neck as a jewel!"

When the squeaks and gasps and little shocked cries of the fine ladies died down, Ripaudi stood as pale of brow as if covered with chalk. He drew down one eye and popped the other, glared at Cado Mosto, glared at Mariuma, and with no flinching glared also at Count Grimani.

"It was that Englishman Herrack, Your Excellency," Cado Mosto explained hurriedly, trying to make things as right as could be, "who took command of our ship and—oh, a madman!—rammed the galleon and led the fight, so that—"

"You lie!" Ripaudi's voice was a shriek. "I and no other man commanded the *Maddalena*! I led the boarders! A thousand Spaniards and more than half of them soldiers—I put every man to the sword! Boarded, plundered and burned the *Santa Benita*!" He looked straight at Señor Esparato and laughed.

There was great buzzing of astonish-

ment. Many fine gentlemen who were pleased by Ripaudi's crazy insolence looked shocked nevertheless, and made sad little sounds of reproach as they eyed the flushed face of Señor Esparato.

At Count Grimani's impatient signal a gentleman officer came quickly, bent his head to catch the order, then went up to Ripaudi and said sternly, "Come with me!"

Ripaudi hesitated, drew himself up. With absent, unhurried movement he unbuckled his sword and thrust it out and backward against old Piombo, who took it with fumbling hesitancy. Ripaudi's fierce eyes contemptuously swept the faces that gazed at him. He turned suddenly on Mariuma:

"You! You lying slut, you I will kill, sometime, somehow!"

Mariuma fainted, or so it seemed, falling forward at the feet of Count Grimani.

Ripaudi marched out with head up and firm steps, followed by the gentleman officer. Mariuma, still unconscious—or so she seemed—was carried out by eager young gentlemen to the household quarters of the Grimani family.

When the hubbub had quieted a little and people gathered in groups all astir with hasty chatter, Count Grimani made the unnerved Cado Mosto talk, and so heard how Herrack had fired his smaller ship, and with fewer men boarded the *Maddalena*; how Mariuma had tricked them into sparing his life; how Herrack with a shortened cutlass had stopped a mutiny; how, when the timid Dutch sailing master would not put the *Maddalena* alongside the great galleon, Herrack had flung him into the scupper and taken command; and how he had sent a barrel of gunpowder into the sprit top, placed a man with a pistol behind the helmsman to make them ram the galleon, then himself rode in the sprit top with the barrel of powder, put fire to it and cut it loose on the galleon

deck. "... A madman, Your Excellency! A madman!"

Count Grimani, from boyhood a sea fighter and but lately an admiral, seemed to glower and made sounds of angry ejaculation, pulling at his beard, but looked slant-wise at Señor Esparato, who suffered much from the recital.

"Where now is this hideous devil of an Englishman?" Count Grimani demanded with appearance of great wrath.

Cado Mosto did not know, but guessed that he was in some wineshop, like others of the *Maddalena's* crew.

Count Grimani pulled his beard through his hand, studied. "I shall give no general order to have him found, lest he learn of it and conceal himself. But you find him and bring him here. Send word as soon as he is found and follow immediately. As long as there is no stir and alarm he will be easily come upon."

"The daughter of Ibn el Toiffel—" Count Grimani moved a hand vaguely toward the doorway through which Mariuma had been removed—"will remain under my protection." To Señor Esparato: "I will at once send a guard to take possession of the *Maddalena*. The fullest inquiry will be made, the most rigorous punishments inflicted!"

All of which did not in the least deceive Señor Esparato, who knew that Count Grimani would rather sleep in the same bed with his enemies, the Piombos, than permit Venice to humble herself.



SUCH WAS what had happened the night before; but Cado Mosto did not say so, for fear that Herrack would refuse to accompany him to the palace.

So Cado Mosto put all of his reproaches into the fraud of the date merchant's daughter pretending to be child of the great corsair, Sidi Hamet; and was so agitated that he did not even notice Herrack was wearing his own stolen cloak.

Herrack roared laughter. Cado Mosto made grimaces of pain, put hands to ears, cried, "Cease that mockery!"

"Mockery? Ho! 'Tis but joyful thanks for your so great kindness to me because of my poor father, who would have been tortured for forty days, then put to death! And I know of your Grimani. He is a seaman! Take me to this Count of Zara, late Admiral of the northern galleys that warred on Uscocchi—or tried, but could not even find the damned Uscobs! I have long wanted to meet him!"

Cado Mosto hastened a messenger ahead and followed.

As they came near the palace there were jibes shouted at Cado Mosto; the trick of Ibn el Toiffel's supposed daughter had reached the ears of common people, who like to laugh.

All round about the foot of the steps leading to the wide entrance were loiterers, eager for any glimpse of great people and always glad to nibble at the first rumors that blew through palace doors.

Suddenly from among them came a pretty girl with colored kerchief over her black hair and bright skirts aswish above her delicate ankles. She ran with uplifted face to Herrack and exclaimed in anxious sweetness, "You are Signior Herrack?"

"Were I not I would say so to please you!"

"Oh, signior, you saved my brother's life! He was a sailor on the *Maddalena* and has told me. I must kiss your hand!"

Herrack wondered what devil of a sailor could have so pretty a sister as he let his hand be taken. With low curt-

esy she pressed it to her mouth; at the same time he felt her fold his fingers over a slip of paper pressed into his palm. She backed away with lifted, inquiring look.

"*Signorina*," said Herrack, "a kiss on the hand for a man who has lips is no reward for saving an ugly brother!"

Under the laughter of those nearby she blushed, threw her hands to her face and ran.

CHAPTER XIX

THE HEAD OF HUROC



THEY went past some idling soldiers and into a large anteroom where there were many people, most of them waiting in postures of fuddled apprehensiveness.

Cado Mosto crossed the room to speak to an old man in a too long gown who, amid the coming and going, now and then called names from a list in his hand.

Herrack sat down under a window, opened the paper in his palm and found a brief note in bad French. Though Mariuma had a polyglot tongue she was ill-schooled in spelling.

He made out that she was telling him to swear that Ibn el Toiffel, the date merchant, was her father and that she had run away with Herrack. Otherwise, she wrote, "I must kill myself to keep Sidi Hamet's secret."

Herrack put the paper into his mouth, chewed slowly.

Cado Mosto sat down disconsolately. He pressed a hand to his face and sighed often.

After a time Herrack was sent for and



Cado Mosto left behind. Herrack was taken through a hall and into a room where a hungry looking clerk in a fine robe stared very hard, told him to sit down, and returned to his scratching with a troublesome goose quill.

It was a room of the kind called a closet: rather small, with walls paneled with carved wood. Much gilt and many bright hangings brightened its dimness.

Count Grimani came through a door that Herrack had not noticed. The clerk gathered up some papers and went out, as if trying to steal away unnoticed. Herrack arose.

For a minute or two Count Grimani looked at Herrack, then sat in a wide chair and left Herrack standing before him.

Count Grimani fingered a gold chain thoughtfully. "You are Edward Herrack?"

"That is true."

"And just who is Edward Herrack?" The Count was as calmly pleasant as if he spoke to a gentleman of his own rank, which was rather a mark of respect, for Herrack was still in rough seaman's garb.

"A seaman of England."

Count Grimani took no notice of the tone and its laconic insolence. "You were recently a captive of the corsair, Sidi Hamet of Tripoli?"

"I was."

"And ransomed?"

"Yes."

"During the delay until the ransom came you were more like a guest than a prisoner?"

"Guest? Ho! For many months I was in his galley and my scarred back will show that his boatswain did not love me! 'Twas then discovered that I was distantly known to him. He took me into his home. But I was not ransomed. He made it appear so, that he might not be reproached for showing favor to a man of his race."

"Um. This famous Renegado has a daughter?"

"She died of the plague."

Count Grimani made soft sounds of sympathy. "Renegado or no, I too have daughters."

Herrack wondered if he would ever dare say, "So the Magnificent Piombo is aware!"

A subtle change came into Count Grimani's face. "The description fits! Can it be? Why, it must be you of whom that noble young Agnolo Piombo came to me to complain this morning! Was it you who assaulted certain citizens of Zara on the quay last night in a quarrel over the courtesan known as Magda?"

"No quarrel, *signior*. I merely cooled some popinjays in salt water. Your noble young Piombo was insolent and tried to force a gondolier who was already engaged. A gondolier is in a way of being a seaman; and landsmen are landsmen, though they wear silk! I had not the honor of knowing Donna Magda.

"But she took you into the gondola?"

"To escape the *custodi*, who would have had the unpleasant duty of arresting me."

Count Grimani frowned with inquiring lift of brows. "Unpleasant?"

"It must be so, since afterwards one of those same soldiers whispered that I had best watch for a knife thrust from shadows. 'Twas one Gratti he meant."

"I know." Count Grimani nodded gravely, spoke in a low voice. "Gratti does not bear a good name." He fingered his gold chain. "But now about this girl, the daughter of—of—" He seemed to search for the name.

"Tbn el Toiffel, date merchant of Tripoli."

"Whom you love?"

"Better than my life!" Herrack gave the words an emphasis that he hoped would have the sound of passion.

"Ha!" Count Grimani laughed softly. "I doubt not that you do love the daughter of Sidi Hamet!"

Herrack started a reply in God's great name but Count Grimani lifted a

hand. "No perjury! Save your oaths. My daughter's maid a few minutes ago gave you a note. She was purposely set to serve and win the confidence of your Lilla Mariuma and brought me the note—first."

"So be it, Your Excellency," said Herrack as readily as a chess player who finds himself mated.

"Then the story she first told on board the *Maddalena* was true?"

Herrack thought of various lies, but his respect for this crafty old veteran of desperate intrigues and intricate plots made him feel 'twere better to be careful. "Yes."

Count Grimani's bejeweled hand slipped down along his beard. He looked pleased. The hoodwinked and baffled Piombos had discarded the daughter of the date merchant, so he had a rich secret to do with as he pleased.

"But who are you, Edward Herrack, to have been entrusted with Sidi Hamet's only daughter, his great treasure?"

Herrack took a deep breath, looked straight into Count Grimani's crafty eyes, said: "This is God's truth! I was a slave, chained to an oar of Sidi Hamet's galley until one day, by chance, he gave me two looks, asked some questions, and knew my name before I told him. He did me the honor to say that mine was a good family, that he knew of my trustworthiness at sea and elsewhere, and sent me to his palace."

"Yes, I have heard that the Renegado is generous to those he likes." Count Grimani nodded. "And Sidi Hamet was too wise a fox to be caught in the Sultan's trap. But he is now in mine!" He looked at Herrack with speculative cunning. "And you love her." No doubt lurked in his voice. It was a plain statement of what seemed obvious. Then, with expectant lift of brows, "You were wedded?"

Herrack's answer came promptly. "Would he send her to sea with me unwedded?"

"I thought not," Count Grimani admitted and sat back, fell to thinking. One hand fingered the gold chain; the other tapped the arm of the chair lightly. Now and then there was a harder tap, followed by a pause, as if some new important consideration had come to mind. His musing became articulate. "I do not see that you can be of any use. A lovely wife and great wealth—" he tossed a delicate fine hand—"lost! I speak plainly. You played your game and lost. So—" Count Grimani struck a bell. Instantly, before the silvery tone of the bell ceased its vibrant hum, both doors were opened, armed men rushed in.

"Take this pirate to prison!" Count Grimani spoke coldly.



HERRACK drew back. Five armed men were about him. A kick, a blow, a swoop, and he could have been armed, have made a fight; but other men would come and others still until in the end he would have only wounds, irons, the gibbet.

Herrack pushed a man aside, looked toward Grimani, called:

"One minute more alone! There is much to say! Gratti talked before he died—and of you!"

"Died? Ah!" Grimani swept an arm, spoke to the guard. "Leave!" When they had gone he said as pleasantly as if there had been nothing but confidential courtesies between them, "So Gratti is dead? My *sbirri* would have me think they report everything that happens. What did he say of me?"

Herrack had intended to tell just what Gratti did say of Piombo the Magnificent and Count Grimani's daughter; but at once knew better than to give information that would merely enrage the count and leave Herrack with no chance to be of use.

"Gratti told me Andrea Piombo, called the Magnificent of Venice, was secretly in Zara, and—"

"He left at an early hour this morning and wondered much why his shadow did not appear. Dead, you say?"

"Dead! No doubt you will add to the charges against me that I killed him—a citizen of Venice!"

"'Tis likely so. And didn't you?"

"I'll not deny it." Denial might only make himself appear a foolish liar. Besides, Gratti's death was not displeasing to the Count of Zara.

"And he told you just what of me?"

Herrack was again tempted to throw out the truth, but thought of a lie that seemed suitable:

"That you, as admiral of the northern galleys, avoided Uskobs, Uscocchi, whatever their name, and pretended you could not find them. so—"

The insult lifted the old admiral half out of his chair. He swore strange oaths. "Avoided? Avoided! The dog of liars! God strike his tongue! Because Andrea Piombo has Uscocchi that will show him their stronghold he—may the Devil deepen the deepest pit of hell to hold him! I know the Piombo way! If successful, he will return from the Quarnero, with dainty, frittering gestures say 'twas nothing! Say that if other men had been less timid they could have done as much! He makes a studied claim of credit by studied disdain of seeming to claim credit, and the fool rabble love him!"



GRIMANI settled back in his chair, muttered, jerked at the gold chain, breathed hard. He did not listen closely until he heard Herrack saying:

"... you hold Mariuma as prisoner and hostage—"

He broke in with impatience. "All true, true. My sympathy for you is great. Yes, great. But in affairs of state the individual must submit to the greater good. No use to beg. No use—" Grimani lifted his knuckles to strike the bell.

"Wrath of God, beg!" Herrack spoke with a blast of sound that made Count

Grimani up-tilt his head in startled jerk. "I beg of no man! What I offer to do is—"

Grimani was irritated. That blast of voice had made him jump. "Pah! For anything you offer to do I can hire bravos by the dozen for a ducat a head!"

"So? Then why have none brought to you the head of Huroc the Uskob! I'll do it! And you can keep your ducat if you then give me Mariuma!"

"Eh? You? No. You are chattering to take up my time and I am tired. But how do you think you could do that?"

"Let me have a fishing boat with a pass from the Count of Zara to go and come among the—"

"And never see you again! Ho! Do I look that simple?"

"You will look simple if 'tis Piombo who brings back Huroc's head and says Count Grimani might have done as much had he less fear!"

Oaths again rattled out of Count Grimani's mouth. "But you? How could you? If you aren't merely talking to waste time, then tell me! Go on, tell me!"

"As I have told you, you hold Lilla Mariuma prisoner and hostage. As long as you hold her prisoner, no matter where I am, you still have chains on me. And you know it!"

Grimani frowned with mild interest, seemed to accept that as reasonably true. "Go on, tell me more."

"Give me a fishing boat and a pass to go and come among the galleys that patrol the coast. Let me fill it with sailors from the *Maddalena*. Then we flee northward from the charge of piracy because of the *Santa Benita*!"

Count Grimani's eyes brightened. "Then? Then?"

"Will we not then, as refugees from the wrath of Venice, be welcome among Uskobs? And trusted? I am an Englishman. So is Huroc. We will soon be like brothers."

"Yes, yes. Go on!"

"Within three months I will bring you the head of the barbarous Huroc or be dead myself!"

Count Grimani made soft little sounds as he reflected, his eyes on Herrack.

"If you keep me here in prison, will you not take off my head before three months? So, if I fail I will lose my head among the Uskobs—and what have you lost? Nothing! And if I do not fail—what chagrin for the Piombos when Count Grimani raises the head of Huroc on a pike before the castle gate for all the world to see!"

"You will bring his head? Actually his head?" Grimani drew a finger about his own throat.

"I'll bring it or leave mine among the Uskobs!"

Grimani brooded. This Herrack was a powerful fellow, desperately audacious. Sidi Hamet had trusted him. With few men and hazardous fury he had nearly captured the *Maddalena*. With the same, proportionately, as few men he had rammed, bombed, boarded, gutted a great Spanish ship. The fellow was indeed bold and successful.

His proposal seemed valid except for one thing. Very likely the ferocious Uskobs would board the fishing boat and kill everybody before there was time to explain that they, too, were pirates, hated by Venice.

Count Grimani spoke of that. "What if they charge? Their yells are deafening! How can you tell them? They speak no language but their barbarous mountain Croat."

"That, sir, is a risk that must be taken. If our hands are empty, we neither flee nor fight—Huroc speaks English! As prisoners, will we not be taken to him?"

Count Grimani thought it was doubtful but did not say so. He was beginning to feel that he did not want to discourage this venture. Huroc had injured Venice's prestige and commerce enormously. When Huroc's Uskobs drove their shallow galleys' prows against a

ship's side, that ship was lost. And if this frittering, be-primped Piombo with his Uscocchi guides got in among the islands and shattered the Uskobs, his triumph would greatly darken the name and reputation of Count Grimani, who had had intelligence enough to be cautious about entering dangerous channels and going aground on submerged rocks.

As Grimani brooded with increasing readiness, Herrack could see that behind those crafty, wisdom-filled eyes was the thought that even after he had the head of Huroc on a pike he might still find reasonable pretense to retain Mariuma as prisoner and hostage for treaty value and ransom price.

Count Grimani rubbed the gold chain with delicate touch, spoke softly. "Within three months?"

"Not one day more. Most likely less!"

"I trust you." Grimani spoke with benign softness, quite as if his favorable liking had chosen Herrack from a multitude and bestowed honor.

"And I ask only that in the meantime you keep Mariuma with the tenderness of a daughter, protect her from harm, let her be happy."

"As a daughter! In my own household! Assuredly, oh assuredly! Now, then, let us talk of how to make the best plans. . . ."



COUNT GRIMANI'S thoughtfulness suggested that Herrack visit his supposed wife. Herrack forced what seemed to him a silly enough grimace to look like a lover's eagerness, but dreaded her wild, folly-struck tongue.

The furtive-moving secretary was summoned and instructed to prepare the daughter of Ebn el Toiffel to receive Herrack. After a short delay Herrack was taken up the curved stone stairway. He was met at the top landing by the pretty maid who had given him the note. She had the slightly guilty expression

of one who hopes that she may not have been found out.

Herrack murmured, "Ah, Signorina Judas, we meet again! Only those who are beautiful have the power of betrayal!"

She blushed. "Your pardon, signior, but I was watched!"

"And could not have whispered '*no lo credete*'?"

The maid went on demurely without speaking until her hand was on the door, and in opening it whispered all in a breath, "She does not know you are coming and every word will be overheard!"

"You are a precious jewel!"

Herrack stepped through. The door closed behind him.

The room was dimmed by great hangings on the walls and before windows, but not gloomy, because of the brilliant hangings.

Mariuma lay brooding on a couch piled high with cushions. She sat up with startled look and was the more startled as he called, "Mariuma!" and rushed at her with arms out. "Ah, darling!" he cried.

The look on his face, the impetuosity of his manner, the incredible "darling!" so amazed her that she jumped from the couch with fluttering stir of garments, stood in dazed bewilderment.

He caught her roughly, bound her arms in his grip, smothered an angry squeak with his mouth against her mouth, hugged so tightly that her breath was squeezed out. His whisper was savage:

"*You fool, don't struggle! We are watched and thought to be married! Play up to it!*" Then, with a lover's groan, "Oh, my darling!"

There was a dazed glow in her tawny eyes as she lay limply in his arms, stared with bewilderment.

He shook her in a grip that held her tightly against him. "*Love me, damn you! Don't you know how?*"

Mariuma gasped, "Oh my beloved!" and folded her loosened arms about his neck as she added in a fierce undertone, "*But I hate you! Oh, how I hate you!*"

Herrack kissed her again and again. Between kisses he muttered, "*You stupid fool! That note of yours—*" He pinched as she tried to draw back. "Oh, Mariuma, how I love you!" Another kiss, then: "*That note of yours gave everything away and anybody but a conceited fool would have known it was a trap!*" Loudly, "I am given a chance to do a service that will unite us forever, my dear!" but whispered fiercely, "*Your blabbering tongue makes everything go wrong!*" She started an angered reply, but he jerked her closer, kissed her with force, put lips to her ear; warned: "*If you do not play your part better here and now, you, I, Sidi Hamet, all are lost! Wake up!*"

That brought a cry very like passion out of Mariuma. She clasped his face, ran fingers through his hair, pulled his face against her breast, bent over his head, whispered venomously:

"*In the name of Allah, tell me why I must do this, when I loathe you!*"

"*That's better!*—I must go away for a time, darling, on a mission for the noble Count Gramini—*keep your mouth shut except for food till I return!* He will treat you as a daughter—and *turn your tongue inside out, shaking loose every secret!*—He is the noblest gentleman of Venice and has given his word—which is not worth a gutted herring if lying profits him!—so you must be gay and happy, for he will protect and care for you—"

"Oh my sweet one, where are you going and to do what?" Between kisses she hissed, "*And some day may my slaves give ten blows of the bastinado for every kiss!*" Mariuma bit him on the arm so savagely that he had much ado not to flinch, but his pinch loosened her small white teeth with a gasp.

"I can't reveal my mission, but I

would dare," said Herrack loudly, "the whole world in arms for you!" Hissed, "*For you? No, you fool! Sidi Hamet gave me his faith and I gave him my oath. I break no oaths, else long ago I had broken your neck!*"

It seemed time to kiss her again.

They fell to talking altogether in whispers and sat snuggled with heads almost concealed by the pile of cushions. That permitted nothing of interest to reach eavesdroppers. Very quickly a knock came on the door; then the door opened. The pretty maid stepped back and the hungry secretary bowed obsequiously:

"I am very sorry to intrude, but His Excellency awaits you, *signior*."

CHAPTER XX

"ON GUARD!"



HERRACK went along the waterfront and found quays and taverns buzzing in excitement, much of it anxious. It was late afternoon. Sailors off the *Maddalena* who had thought themselves rich were rousing from the debauch to find pockets empty, a guard on board the *Maddalena*, Ripaudi arrested, and themselves likely to be.

They had aching heads, queasy bellies, uneasy fears, no friends and no credit. The wildest of alarming rumors swirled tongues about as gusty winds toss autumn leaves. All of them might have their heads taken off for piracy. At least, so 'twas said and not firmly doubted. They who had owned the town the night before were now a bedraggled lot; many were hungry, all thirsty, and there wasn't a ducat among a dozen.

Herrack got the old French gunner to a table in the shadows of an obscure wineshop. His lone bloodshot eye gazed with disconsolate lack-luster and he shook his clipped head in rueful sadness:

"Had the Spaniards taken us, *monsieur*, then we were pirates. 'Twere

justice then to string us by the necks. But name of God!" He beat the table with a fist. "How can those who win a seafight be pirates? I will turn Turk before ever again I serve a Venetian! What do you say, my friend?"

"That I have no such love of Venice or Zara as to stay and let my blood brighten her flagstones! I mean to go."

"Go? Go where? And how? We can board what ship?"

"I will find the way if there are ten men I trust to go with me."

"To sea?"

"Aye, gunner."

"I will find a hundred, *monsieur!*"

"There are not that many in the world I'd trust. No! No more than ten at most may go, and half the number rather than more. But good men. Yourself. Pietro, Carlos, and others from your gunner crews. The fewer the Italians among them the better."

"We go where?"

"Where we'll be welcome—and safe from Venice. More than that I will not say. If any man would know more, he can stay behind, keep Ripaudi company in prison, later on the gibbet!"

The old gunner found his earthen mug was refilled as soon as emptied. He grew cheerful. "Faith of a Christian!" He smote Herrack's shoulder. "Life is not such a bad thing to have after all! There still are ships to be had for the taking, and girls to welcome you ashore! Heigh-ho! You and Ripaudi are no friends, but it does not give me joy to think our brave captain may be hanged."

"I, too," said Herrack coolly, "hope that he escapes hanging."

The gunner could not read the menace behind Herrack's wish, but sucked at his mug, struck palm to table with pistol-like clap, exclaimed:

"Ho, as long as there is salt water for ships to sail on, gunpowder to sink them, and a good God to poke these Venetians into hell, the world might be a worse place!"

Herrack stood up, laid down a few coins. "Spend these with care. Find Carlos and Black Peter. We'll meet again soon."



IT WAS DARK but still early in the evening when Herrack went by quiet streets and approached Magda's house from the rear.

He jumped to get a finger hold on the top of the wall, scrambled up and over, being thankful it was high—lesser walls were crested with broken glass. He did not want to be seen and have his friendliness with Magda known to the *sbirri*.

Herrack knocked long at the heavy back door before Quella spoke from a window overhead. She croaked harshly:

"What devil are you to be at the back door of our house instead of ringing the bell at the wall gate? Away! I will not open it, but will cry for—"

"And had I rung the gate bell you would have feared the devil was come to claim you and would not have opened it!"

Quella's harsh croak changed to an eager key. "Ah, 'tis *you*!"

"And come the back way, not to disturb your fine company if—"

"The house is closed to all. Only open to you and that imp Jehan, who comes only to say that he cannot find you! I come at once!"

The shadow-blot her head made in the window disappeared.

The door opened under the candle light Quella held up. Before he was across the threshold she began her babbling:

"... 'twas an evil day for Magda that the black-bearded beast of a Ripaudi was born!" She walked sidewise with candle before her and face rearward, chattered a whine of saints' names and woe. "... 'tis not love but sickness, disease, the plague! . . ."

She put down the candle on the top of the high stone over and foamed wine into a great goblet. Her tongue never

paused. She came close and peered up at Herrack as he drank, and her beady eyes snapped as she screeched, "There is no one to cure a maid of love-folly, but Signior Death!"

Herrack put down the goblet. "But good mother, why reproach men if you fair maids are such fools as to love us? 'Tis not of my wish or making!"

"I have cursed him! I curse the breasts that suckled him! I curse the—"

"Then is it not time to try something better?"

"I have melted his image in wax! I have burned a hair from his head over a candle of wolf fat at midnight and—"

"'Twas more likely mutton suet and you were cheated by the witch who sold it. Since Magda wants me, let us go."

"Wants you? Oh, that it were you she wanted! 'Tis that Ripaudi! And Jehan has worn his shoes to the flesh searching for you. Even Matteo, all sick and pale from lost blood, looks for you to please her."

"All right, come along."

Quella hunched nearer.

"He is nothing but a beggerly bravo she put into velvet! A conceited coxcomb always—"

"Aye, as treacherous a dog as ever snapped from shadows. But withal, Quella, not a coward. He fights!"

"He steals and lies! He begs my Magda for money that he throws to women! He has beaten her, kicked, mocked her, robbed her, and still she loves him!"

"Try poison again."

"Oh, *signior*, I—I, old Quella!—beg of you, do not lift a hand to save him!"

"Save him? I would crawl over cobbles on bare knees merely to cut his throat!"

Herrack refilled the goblet and drank, wiped his beard with the back of his hand, took up the candle:

"Let us visit the love-torn maid and count her sighs!"

(to be concluded)



THE DEVIL-DEVIL STONE

by Murray Leinster

THE drums began suddenly. *BOOM-boom-boom-boom!* Without preliminary and without faltering, they filled all the night with the tempo which has meant alarm and danger since time began in New Guinea. *BOOM-boom-boom-boom!* . . . The hills took up the sound and echoed it. The tree-trunks separated the concussions into a myriad lesser sounds. And Kendall woke and in one movement came to his feet with a revolver out and ready.

Only thirty seconds past, the jungle had been utterly still. Darkness so dense as to be tangible, emphasized by the sharp-edged speckles of white-hot moonlight which filtered down through the jungle-roof. Silence so complete that one could distinctly hear the occasional liquid slapping sound of a droplet of

condensed moisture falling from one leaf to another.

That was what had been. Now the drums filled all the night. Nearby, they were a tumult. A little farther on, they were a snarling growl. Even miles and miles away they kept their note of savagery, a monotonous, sullen muttering.

Kendall stood listening, gun out, for perhaps five seconds. Then he nodded to himself and composedly bent down and began to lace his boots. Loosening them had been his only concession to repose, anyhow.

Two hundred miles from Port Moresby, in the middle of the Bismarck Mountain country, a white man is no such demigod he may be elsewhere. There the prowess of the white race is only a legend men are free to doubt. But ortho-

doxy requires full faith in the magical powers of drums and such occult objects as, say, the devil-devil stone of Kulata. The drums were booming now and the devil-devil stone was in process of proving its power. It had already drawn the two white men up from the coast on a mere report and the pledged faith of a devil-devil doctor. At least, Tompkins said good faith was pledged; but his word was not especially good, and no devil-devil doctor can be trusted at all.

The devil-devil stone had drawn them here. Report said that it was a crystal which glittered when the sun shone on it. That it was shaped like two pyramids placed base to base. That no water would wet it. Further, report said that it was nearly as large as a man's fist, and that it conferred invulnerability, bravery, bloodthirstiness and sex-appeal upon its devotees. It was certain that confidence in its powers had made the folk of Kulata more than usually murderous, and that the village contained several times the normal number of smoke-cured heads.

All New Guinea likes human heads. When properly prepared, they are money. But white men like diamonds, and by its description the devil-devil stone was a big one.

Kendall made ready for immediate travel. His repeating rifle, half a dozen padded sticks of dynamite, the lightest of light packs. He showed no sign of panic, though. The drums meant devilment. Their tempo meant alarm. Alarm meant battle, murder, and sudden death. And Kendall was exactly where he was most likely to become involved in all of them. But the fact that he was still alive was proof that he had not actually been discovered, and if the drums were beating because traces of his passage had been seen, then the more coolly he acted, the better were his chances. At that, his chances weren't really good.

Making ready, he continued to listen intently. He located the source of the

drumming and swore a little, without heat. The drums sounded in the village of the devil-devil stone, Kulata. He and Tompkins had traveled ten horrible days to get to that village in hopes of a highly improbable business transaction with its devil-devil doctor. The transaction required either complete secrecy or a good-sized army. They had tried for secrecy. But it looked like they weren't getting it. Kendall swore dispassionately, felt of his rifle and settled his revolver, then turned to his companion.

Tompkins wasn't there.

For one second, for two, Kendall stared about him. Tompkins had lain down as he did and it was reasonable, inevitable, that he should have awakened when the drums began. He ought to be right here! But he wasn't.

Kendall bent down suddenly in the darkness. His fingers rustled on small green things. The earth was cool where Tompkins had been. The green things his body had crushed were erect again. That meant he'd been gone for some time. He'd stolen away. He must have. And to slip off in the darkness meant—well, it certainly meant betrayal. Considering Tompkins' abilities, Kendall rather grimly decided that it meant suicide too.

BOOM-boom-boom-boom! The drums kept on. Rhythmically. Steadily. Unwaveringly. In a tempo which was itself hysteria, and assuredly calculated to produce panic in any one for whose hunting it signaled.

Kendall slipped his pack over his shoulders. He slung his rifle handily ready. He took three swift, noiseless steps—and heard a crash nearby. He swung to face it. Whispered, terror-racked blasphemies came out of the darkness. Kendall said evenly:

"Steady there, Tompkins! There's no time to lose, since you've messed up things. Come on!"

More crashings. Little speckles of moonlight disclosed Tompkins' figure

as he came stumbling forward. His face was a mask of terror.

"'Ell's poppin'!" he gasped. "The village—full o' devils! Full of 'em! Gord! Don't leave me!"

"Hurt?" demanded Kendall. "How bad?"

He ran his hands over the trembling body which crowded close to him. He noted full preparation for travel. Not only weapons, not only the padded dynamite-sticks, but the pack and the rations which were needed for the trip back to the coast. Tompkins had used him for guide, for companion, for guard on the way up. And he'd thought he could duck out . . .

"You're not hurt," said Kendall curtly. "Come on!"

But then, on the instant, he tightened his grip on the other's arm in a wordless, imperative command for silence. He had heard something.

The drums, of course. Their echoes, flung from mountain-flank to mountain-flank; the murmurous, re-echoed sound the tree-trunks added to the din; but something else. It was men.

Kendall reached to the padded sticks of dynamite behind him. He twisted a bit of fuse from his pocket. He fitted it into place, pinching it off at an accurately estimated length. He bent low and a furtive light flickered. Something began to fizz, emitting small sparks. He covered it with leaves.

"Come along," he said quietly. "I've no time to deal with you now. I will, though! Come along and don't make any noise!"

He led the way. Tompkins followed him. For the first few minutes their aim seemed to be speed even at the cost of silence, and they covered ground swiftly. The little white-hot specks of moonlight that filtered down here and there were an astonishing amount of help. And primary jungle, too, is not the impenetrable tangle secondary stuff is. There were places where some cutting

would have been desirable, but they forced their way through. And it would have seemed that the thunder of the drums should have drowned out even such noises as they made. But Kendall knew better.

"Now be still!" he commanded under his breath, at a time and spot of his own choosing. "No hurry now, if we go quietly."

Tompkins panted. His teeth chattered.

"They—saw me!" he gasped. "Devils!"

"The drums told me they know a white man was about," said Kendall grimly. "You keep quiet."

They waited. The devil-devil drums kept on, kept on . . .



THEN, between beats, they stopped.

The silence that fell was deathlike. The drums had been a muffled but an overwhelming uproar. Their rhythm had been hypnotic and compelling. It had seemed as if the very jungle quivered to their beat. They stopped, and the ear-drums of the two white men ached with the stillness.

Kendall held his companion in a grip of iron.

"Still!" he hissed savagely in his ear.

There were little rustling sounds. They might have been the whisper of leaves in a vagrant puff of air, or the movement of some crawling thing upon the jungle floor, or literally nothing at all. But to Tompkins they were devils, such devils as he had seen not long since, masked and hooded and dancing with an obscene solemnity among the houses of Kulata.

A bird chirped sleepily. There was a rustling off to the right. An indefinable sound off to the left. The jungle suddenly became full of half-heard little sounds, all combining to make a stillness that was full of menace.

Kendall's fingers tightened as Tompkins' breath became audibly terrified. Then there was an authentic sound

nearby and in a patch of moonlight a Thing appeared. It was, unquestionably, a devil. It had the head of a bird, except no bird was ever so huge. And there were jaws in which teeth showed whitely, and colossal, staring eyes. Another monstrous Thing drew near. And this had the face of a nightmare, and it stared behind with another face as ghastly and as incredible as the face in front. The two monstrosities conferred, with human legs supporting them and human hands grasping spears above.

Kendall watched, motionless. And then, a mile or more away, there was a sudden rending explosion. It was the sharp, crisp bark of dynamite. The two Things whirled and raced for the source of the sound. And there were rustlings and even crashings here and there to right and left, while the echoes of the explosion went from crag to peak all among the mountains and came back fainter and yet more faint until they died away.

"And that," said Kendall dryly, "is that. We've got to find a good place to hide out in."

"Get away!" panted Tompkins in sudden hysteria. "Get away! The—the village, full of devils—"

Kendall smiled without any mirth.

"By the costumes, they were initiating somebody into one of their secret societies." His voice changed. "You got that stone, didn't you? Hand it over!"

Tompkins jumped.

"I didn't get it!" he cried shrilly. "I—I was scoutin' around the village, expectin' to get in touch with old Imru an' make the bargain he'd promised. An'—I tol' you what happened! They saw me!"

Kendall looked at him. Tompkins protested shrilly. Kendall led the way off into darkness.

"You said," he commented tonelessly, "that you'd arranged a deal with Imru. He'd trade the devil-devil stone

for some sleight-of-hand apparatus. He's traveled, and he's decided that even the devil-devil stone doesn't go over quite as well as a few trick balls and vanishing handkerchiefs. He's right. The devil-devil stone is probably a hundred-carat diamond or better, but it isn't worth as much to him as a vanishing rubber cigar."

He swung around a monster jungle-tree and started to climb a steep slope.

"You told a pretty plausible tale," he added detachedly. "Quite plausible. You were to give him the apparatus and show him how to work it in exchange for the devil-devil stone. But you had me come along, risking my neck, because it was too hair-raising a trip for one man alone, and it had all to be done in secret. Tonight you ducked out on me. You went to the village. You killed the devil-devil doctor and got the devil-devil stone—"

"I didn't!" protested Tompkins shrilly. "I 'aven't got it, Kendall! I 'aven't!"

"And you planned to leave spoor leading to me. When the Kulata warriors had found and killed me, they wouldn't be looking for another white man. You'd be free to head back for the coast."

Tompkins cried vehemently:

"I never! S'elp me, Kendall, I never did! Gord! I wouldn't—"

"You were almost back to me, leaving a clear trail," said Kendall, "when the drums began. So they didn't see you in the village, or the drums would have started sooner. They found somebody dead by a white man's weapon. The drums started, and you lost your nerve. Which is going to cost you something! You'd better give me the stone."

Tompkins' voice was shrill as he denied impassionately that he had the diamond. He continued to deny it as the two of them fought their way upward, up a steep hillside, and ultimately, some three hours later, over a divide which dropped them into a dark and moonless valley where the sound of the hunt behind them was lost.



BUT that hunt had not stopped. A time-fused stick of dynamite, set to go off when the village warriors would have passed it, had turned out well. The warriors were almost upon the white men when the dynamite went off. But a dynamite explosion is so distinctively a white man's noise that they had turned about, thinking the white man was at bay behind them. They made a mistake, but they did not abandon the hunt. Their mistake merely gave the white men nearly ten hours start before daylight and some hours of tracking straightened out the matter.

Meanwhile the white men traveled hard. When dawn came they had climbed and descended mountain-flanks for what seemed eons, and they were perhaps fifteen miles in a direct line from the village of the devil-devil stone. They were weary and draggled, and all night they had strained every nerve for speed. In consequence, their trail was fairly clear.

At last they rested, where an upcropping of rock forbade trees to grow for a certain space. They could see for many miles to eastward, where the mountains they had crossed rose toward the sky, and beyond them other mountains, and beyond them yet more mountains. They were all forest-clad and infinitely peaceful, with woolly clouds clinging irregularly to their upper flanks. The sun sailed upward and the jungle began to steam with the heat of it. The world was quiet and still. A little hum of contentment seemed to come from all about the horizon. It was beautifully restful. The two white men lay still, staring backward across the valley they had traversed in the last precarious darkness before the break of day.

"There's a village," said Kendall presently. He looked at his compass and back at the two or three patches of visible palm-leaf thatch, from about which many small curls of white smoke arose.

"What do I care?" asked Tompkins

sullenly. He was worn out, was Tompkins; like Kendall, he was scratched and scarred by thorns, and he was dirtied and stained by falls in mud or against climbing veins. He expanded his original question, looking at Kendall with small, red-rimmed eyes.

"What the hell do I care?"

Kendall brought his rifle around to where it would be handy. He checked something again by the compass.

"We went close to that village last night," he said gently.

"What's the matter with that?"

"Just," said Kendall, "that there are bush-paths around that village, and they're bare earth in the daytime and have a skin of soft mud at night. Our tracks will show."

Down in the village a measured, rhythmic hubbub arose. There was a fitful breeze, and the sound came only in gusts, but it was a drum. And the tempo was that of alarm.

Tompkins swore hysterically.

"The bloody *utus* know we're 'ere! We're sunk, Kendall! We're gorn!"

Kendall regarded him with scorn.

"To be sure. You are. You'll never get through, with what's ahead of us. You'd better give me the stone, Tompkins. You'll never get through with it."

Then something seemed to draw his attention away. He stared at a certain spot at the jungle's edge.

"I 'aven't got the stone!" shrilled Tompkins. "I 'aven't got it—"

But Kendall's rifle interrupted him. It crashed suddenly, and a fuzzy-headed man leaped convulsively into view and dropped out of sight again.

"I think," said Kendall softly, "that we'd better be moving."

He moved swiftly into the jungle once more. Tompkins stumbled after him, already exhausted.



BUT that was only the beginning. The second valley on, Tompkins received an arrow through the light pack that still clung to his shoulders.

And before they reached the mountain-flank that was the valley's farther side, a flung war-club hit Kendall from behind, and would have broken his spine had it not happened to strike first upon the rifle slung across his back. There had been no sign of any assailant; but while Kendall floundered on the ground, painfully getting out a revolver, he heard Tompkins screaming.

He was fighting three human monstrosities at once with his clubbed rifle. They were tattooed and scarified and decorated with streaks of lime and ornaments of bone, and one of them was in the act of launching an excellent spear-thrust when Kendall opened fire between Tompkins' legs. Which ended that battle, but spread the alarm of their presence through this whole valley.

They went on desperately, and slid down into another precipitous chasm between two mountains, and there they walked slap into the tiniest of possible villages before they knew it. The surprise was mutual. Naked, frizzy-haired women were cooking, and bare, pot-bellied children looked up from their play to gaze goggle-eyed at the weary white men, and warriors regarded them in paralyzed amazement.

"Keep on! Don't stop!" Kendall said sharply.

And he fumbled a dynamite stick out of its padding and touched a match to its ready fuse. The two white men stumbled straight on through the village, and Kendall tossed the fizzing stick of explosive into the tiny devil-devil house, squarely between the legs of the dumfounded devil-devil doctor.

The explosion came at a highly favorable time, because the thirty odd warriors of the village had recovered just enough from their amazement to realize

that two especially valuable white heads were about to leave the village on their original shoulders. The warriors were moving toward the white men, when the front of the devil-devil house opened out, and the roof blew up blazing, and the most especially holy devil-devil image tore itself to bits.

It was some time before the shattered nerves of the warriors recovered, and when they did there was more trouble afoot. New and strange warriors appeared, of neighboring and therefore hostile tribes, trailing the two white men with a passionate eagerness, and annexing any stray loot or heads that came their way.

Kendall and Tompkins, in fact, were the spear-point of a surge of warfare that swept across the mountains. Where they stumbled through a valley and were sighted, the warriors arose and hunted them. When they fought their way desperately into the next valley, the warriors of the first followed anxiously and seized the opportunity to kill and loot the local inhabitants while pressing after the white men. Always behind came the warriors of the village of the devil-devil stone. It was not possible to avoid such pursuit forever, yet the mutual hostility of the pursuers worked for the fugitives.

In New Guinea, a village, or at most a valley, is a nation itself. One may steal a woman from a neighboring village, or take a head, and be assured of the support of public opinion in the practice of long-established custom. So that while the several groups of hunters after the heads of Kendall and Tompkins might be said to be united in the effort, there was no coöperation. There was rivalry, yes. Eager rivalry, which was spiced by homicide and seasoned by loot.

To the fugitives, all this was unknown. All Tompkins knew was the agony of continuing to flee with exhaustion weighing him down. Before sunset they had fought three separate times and had

heard the yells of half a dozen combats behind them. When darkness fell, they knew that the news of their coming had somehow gone before them. When they staggered over the last divide they could force their legs to climb, there were drums going in the valley ahead.

That was the last straw. Tompkins was sobbing with fatigue and Kendall's normally composed face was gray with weariness. They stood tottering upon their feet and looked down into the vast dark gulf before them. The moon had not yet risen, and there were merely innumerable stars in a sky of utter black, and huge darknesses rearing upward all about—they were mountains—and a black, blank obscurity ahead. Out of that obscurity came drums.

They were hurrying drums. Menacing drums. Booming, rumbling, pounding drums, growling of battle and murder and sudden death. And from behind came more faintly but no less ominously the rumbling of other drums. To right and left were throbbings faint enough to be echoes, but might be drums in villages yet unencountered.



ALL the drums in all the world were beating for the hunt and the death of two white men, and Tompkins wailed and slumped to the ground.

"They've got us! I'm done!" This in sobs. "I 'ave to rest, Kendall!"

Kendall smiled queerly at him, rocking on his feet from fatigue and blinking to keep his eyes from closing.

"Done, are you?" he asked gently. "Done? Then give me the devil-devil stone and I'll let you sleep! I'm going on. It's your fault we're in this mess, anyhow. I thought we came up here to trade, not murder."

"I 'aven't got it!" wailed Tompkins. "S'elp me Gord, I 'aven't got it!"

He went on in an abandon of despair and misery, while the sound of drums rose to the stars all about them, and Kendall waited, patiently rocking.

But suddenly Kendall turned his head and listened.

"Here are more of them. Get up and fight, Tompkins."

And figures rushed suddenly from nowhere, and rifle flames spat through the darkness and war-clubs flailed, and Tompkins emptied a revolver apathetically from a sitting position on a rock. The spitting of pistols rose to a roar and died down again, and Kendall swore wearily.

"That tears it," he said tiredly. "That noise will bring all creation down on us!"

Then a wounded man groaned, and Kendall went over to make sure he wasn't dangerous. He found him struggling feebly, lime-streaked and scarified and unspeakably tattooed, spun around and dropped by a heavy-caliber bullet. But he could walk, and Kendall regarded him with weary speculation. Then he fumbled for the padded sticks of dynamite. There were only two left.

"Tompkins," he said unemotionally, "hand me some dynamite. We'll get a few winks of sleep."

"What?" said Tompkins exhaustedly. "what you goin' to do?"

Kendall worked, binding the sound arm of the wounded man firmly to his side. He strung out ten feet of cord and fastened a padded package. Five feet more and he bound in another.

"A stick of dynamite," commanded Kendall again. "If we live till we get this chap going, he'll end our troubles for to-night."

Twice again he bound heavily padded bundles to a cord that trailed from the now standing man. He struck a match.

"They'll see," said Tompkins exhaustedly.

"Of course," said Kendall. Something fizzed. He moved. Something else fizzed. A third and fourth thing spat little sparks in the utter blackness.

"Here, you," said Kendall kindly, "these sparks are devils. *Auva-laupe*

—*ove*—devils! They're going to get you. Run away! *Moao! Onakamal Aulau!*"

One of the fuses spat more brightly than before and the wounded man yelled and fled. The padded bundles bounced and sparked as they trailed after him.

"Now up the hill!" commanded Kendall wearily. "Get up, Tompkins! I'm going to take the stone away from you in the morning, but now get up the hill!"

A stick of dynamite went off with a shattering roar a few hundred yards away. The hillsides echoed and re-echoed the sound bewilderingly. Tompkins attacked the slope, whimpering exhaustedly, while Kendall followed. They went a dreadful three hundred feet up. A second explosion sounded, a long distance away, and screams followed it.

The two white men slept. Instantly, heavily, and utterly without caution. But they were shielded by a patch of jungle growth from the moonlight which presently poured down upon the world. They did not hear the other dynamite explosions, nor the incidental noises which arose when the warriors of five different valleys encountered each other as they hastened toward the sounds which only white men could make. They did not hear anything. They slept.

But Kendall twitched a little in his sleep and once, toward morning, he woke with a start. Tompkins dreamed, and he was whimpering indistinctly:

"I 'aven't got it, Kendall! S'elp me!"

In the morning they awoke together and Tompkins snarled at him because he was refreshed, and Kendall was smiling queerly at the instant that an arrow whizzed within an inch of his head. A single enthusiastic hunter had back-trailed a warrior who had been chased by devils, and had found the white men's spoor. And he was an ambitious young man, wherefore he essayed to kill at least one of them without outside help, when he found them. And when they had killed him instead, they knew that their gunfire would direct pursuit again.

They were partly rested, now, and they had a fair lead. But they had no time to lose and word was somehow passing between villages. About noon a drum began to boom off to their right. Tompkins cursed it, but Kendall led the dive off their course and they missed the men of that village. Then, just before sundown they saw the smoke of signal-fires and heard drums booming dully, so they traveled desperately all that night.

Their evasions were not always successful, though. They lost count of the times they fought. They plunged on through jungles and swamps and hostile country, tearing their clothing and their flesh. They slept while marching, waking only when they crashed into some monster jungle-tree. They fought while weariness unutterable numbed their limbs, and their eyes blinked and closed, even when aligned along their rifle-sights. And always behind them there were hunting men, eager, enthusiastic hunting men. And always, somewhere about a changing horizon, there was a drum beating the sullen, rhythmic, *BOOM-boom-boom*, the signal of battle and murder and sudden death.

And always, too, Tompkins gave way to despair. A hundred times he flung himself down, completely spent, cursing all things with sleep-drugged lips and swearing in a husky whine that he could not go on. . . . And a hundred times Kendall grinned drearily at him and would not let him rest unless he gave up the devil-devil stone as the price of sleep and death. And a hundred times Tompkins protested shrilly that he did not have the stone, and somehow staggered to his feet and followed as Kendall led on. And drums beat to the north of them, to the south of them, and sometimes the whole horizon seemed to mutter with the malevolent distant booming of the drums.

They ceased to hear them. They went on through centuries of flight. They ceased to speak, save in croakings of

the essentials of flight. They nearly ceased to eat, but Tompkins drank feverishly when he could. Life itself became flight, and flight, an obsession and a delirium.

They were skeletons, clothed in tattered rags, fleeing in an exhaustion so complete that at no time were they fully conscious of anything. Tompkins wept weakly as he staggered in Kendall's wake, weeping because he could not lie down and be killed and never again have to move. He kept on only because Kendall urged him to rest. Kendall told him, croaking, that as soon as he slept he would be searched for the devil-devil stone and left alone. But always Tompkins whimpered hysterically that he did not have the shining magic of Kulata—and fought his way onward.



AND then, suddenly, there were men about them. Frizzy-haired men with the scarifications of old tattooings upon their faces, and Kendall and Tompkins drearily raised their rifles to fight again.

"Hold hard, Tompkins! Don't shoot!"

Tompkins dazedly looked about him and really saw his surroundings for the first time in many days. There was water visible ahead, which could only be the Gulf of Papua. And there was a palisade, and a flagpole on which the Union Jack was flying, and the frizzy-haired men wore uniform blouses above their loin-cloths, and were obviously members of the New Guinea Native Constabulary.

Kendall rocked on his feet and grinned tiredly. He looked at Tompkins and he marveled detachedly at the wreck of the man. He pulled himself together, a scarecrow with deep-sunk eyes. He addressed the staring Constabulary men.

"You go along big fella marster," said Kendall kindly. "Tell him two-fella *tao* come along plenty dam' quick."

The frizzy-haired men departed, be-

cause, whatever his appearance, Kendall's manner was that of the white man who commands and is to be obeyed. And Tompkins blubbered abruptly in a sudden hysterical relief. But he stopped short. He did not cast himself down to rest. He looked suspiciously at Kendall. And Kendall smiled at him. With fatigue-stiffened fingers he brought his rifle around to convenient reach.

"Now," said Kendall gently, "we settle up. I've let you keep that stone so far, because without it you had no backbone. And I needed you to fight. But now I'm taking that stone away from you because, since we're safe, you'll feel you have to kill me to have it all for yourself. And I shan't let you kill me. So you'll give me the stone. Now."

Tompkins faced him truculently.

"I ain't got it!" he snarled shrilly. "I ain't got it! I never did 'ave it!"

Kendall brought his rifle to accurate line with Tompkins' heart.

"I'm going to give you your split," he said as gently as before, "but if you don't turn over that stone before those troopers get back, I'm going to kill you and take it, if I have to cut your body into little pieces to find it. And I mean it, Tompkins."

He did mean it. Tompkins saw that he did. From truculence he turned to terror. He whimpered, groveled, wept.

"They're coming back," said Kendall. "I can't waste any more time, Tompkins. Give me the stone."

Tompkins slavered with pure panic, protesting hysterically. Kendall's finger tightened on the trigger of his rifle.

So Tompkins gave him the stone.

"It's larger than I thought," Kendall observed dispassionately. "I'll sell it in Sidney and split with you there."

Then he yawned prodigiously. He was very tired, was Kendall.



ISHMAEL

By Berton Braley



I AM Ishmael, son of Hagar, and the seed of Abraham,
My trail is through the wilderness, my home is—where I am.

And while I wander far and wide, my brother waxes fat,
It's pretty soft for Isaac, but I do not fret at that.

I do not envy Isaac, or his acres, or his kine,
I am Ishmael the Archer, and the wilderness is mine!

And when the game is plentiful my arrows bring it down,
And from the plodding caravans that move from town to town,

I take some little luxuries to which I am inclined,
The property of Isaac and of others of his kind.

Is famine in the wilderness? I do not pine and weep.
I rustle Isaac's cattle, and I drive off Isaac's sheep.

And Isaac calls for constables and sends them out in haste,
I let them follow me awhile, then lose them in the waste.

I am Ishmael, son of Hagar, I am lithe and brown and lean,
Can Isaac taste the joy of life with gusto half so keen?

Can Isaac's cooks design a sauce that in the last degree
Is such a spur to appetite as hunger is to me?

Can Isaac's silken dalliance be sweeter to desire
Than kisses of a desert lass which stir the blood to fire?

And what does Isaac know of life that laughs in face of death—
My wealthy brother Isaac, who is soft and short of breath?

I, master of the wilderness, he—slave of gold and gear;
He, bound by law and custom; I, roving free and clear,

Sire of a lusty nomad breed, swift, wary, strong and slim
Which soon will harry Isaac's seed as now I harry him!

Sarah drove me and mother out. The Lord, He let it be;
He knew what suited Isaac and He knew what suited me,

Me, Ishmael, son of Hagar, pioneer of no man's land,
Whom the sheltered clan of Isaac will not ever understand!



ON THE PROD

*The life story of a Texas bad man
last of three parts*

By Clyde Wantland

(The story so far)

At the age of fourteen, facing his first judge and jury, Ben Thompson outlined the code which was to make of him the rowdiest, flashiest, possibly the most ruthless killer that ever came out of the border states.

"Why did you shoot Theo Brown, your playmate?" the judge demanded.

"He dared me to."

"But why did you shoot to hit him?"

"Hell, that's what you shoot for, ain't it—to hit? Damn a feller that shoots to miss!"

They sent him to the penitentiary that time, but he was released within a few months. And for a time he confounded his critics. For in Austin, in the fall of 1868, he stood off a Comanche raid single-handed, killing five and

holding Packsaddle Pass until help arrived from the city. Thus began and ended the last Indian raid into Austin, the raid which began and ended Ben Thompson's only whole-hearted exploit on the side of law and order. Shortly he was to show himself in the character that has lived in history.

After a notorious knife duel in New Orleans, he enlisted with Colonel Baylor's regiment at the outbreak of the Civil War. Before the outfit had reached its first objective, trouble struck, with Thompson at the bottom. In a dispute over military funds, he killed two officers and ended his first enlistment a fugitive from the flag he had sworn to defend.

The next three years were crowded indeed. He married in Austin, joined the famous Colonel John S. (Old Rip) Ford's rangers, stayed with them long enough to become a hunted man on both sides of the Rio Grande, led a notorious band of renegades—and stopped them from raiding a Confederate customs house—and capped red months of border raiding by a blazing gun battle over a faro game in Laredo, which ended with two men dead and a city looking for his blood.

He had hit the border at its wildest, had set it aflame, had made a name for himself that is still a tradition, and departed, all within two months. But more was yet to come. Ben Thompson, forking a stolen mule, was headed for Corpus Christi, in search of new excitement.

Thompson finally concluded a truce with Old Rip Ford and was given permission to raise a company for predatory service against Federal wagon trains on the Santa Fé trail, but the war ended before anything of importance was accomplished, and Thompson promptly found himself under arrest by Federal authorities. But iron bars couldn't hold him long—not with a ten thousand dollar offer to join Maxi-

milian's army in Mexico. A whispered palaver, a bribe—and he was on his way.

Maximilian fell within six months, and Thompson, ravaged by yellow fever, made his way back to Austin, almost immediately to serve a penitentiary term for felonious assault on his old Nemesis, Theo Brown. On his release he hit the trail for Abilene, where Texas cattle followed the longhorn trail to be bartered for Kansas gold. A saloon which he opened having been taken by Wild Bill Hickok in his temporary absence, he shifted to Ellsworth.

Here the long smoldering feud between Kansas and the boys from the Lone Star State broke out. It was but natural that Thompson should become the spark to set off the explosion. Furious because a Kansan had double-crossed him in a gambling deal, he stood off an armed, partisan mob so successfully that the entire police force was discharged.

Ben decided to take a sightseeing trip to Leadville. Within a few days he met an old enemy of Mexican days. There was the flash of a knife, four blasts from Ben's six-shooter and the assailant was dead. Thus ended Thompson's pleasure trip to Leadville. But more dangerous trips lay ahead.

CHAPTER VI

HIRED TO KILL



WHEN BEN came down from Leadville the war between the Santa Fé and D&RG for possession of trackage rights through Royal Gorge was at white heat.

The Santa Fé had possession of the terminal facilities in Pueblo, but holding them against their adversaries was a matter of grave concern. Both sides began hiring fighters. Good tough killers were worth up to fifty dollars and there was work for hundreds of them.

The Santa Fé offered Ben Thompson \$5,000 to do nothing but hold the roundhouse against all comers. He needed the money, so he took his first and only job as a hired killer.

By the terms of this contract, however, Ben showed a new side of his nature; he specifically declined to resist any court order, any court process, or any duly qualified officer of the law.

He agreed to hold the roundhouse against all mobs and all unauthorized assailants and he did this so well that the other side offered him \$25,000 to betray his employers.

This Ben declined to do.

There were two persons killed in skirmishing around the roundhouse, but Ben was directly connected with neither affair.

Then the courts intervened; writs were issued; the affair became so complicated that every other man was an officer of some kind or another. And Ben Thompson, tired of his rôle of hired killer, returned to Austin in the summer of 1879.

Ben returned to Austin riding the cow-catcher of the Katy engine that drew the train to town, having a great time—and he had had one all up the line, according to advance reports of his journey wired ahead. As was his custom, he had a good audience to witness his arrival and entertained them with shooting out the lights in the station, then playfully commandeering the engine and doing a little railroading on his own. His railroad experience in Pueblo had apparently opened to him a new experience that he liked.

Sobering up in a couple of days, he entered the local gambling fields by taking over a half interest in the Senate Gambling Halls, over the Iron Front Saloon.

Presently, however, another whim struck him and he decided that Austin was altogether too boisterous. So Ben decided to run for city marshal and inserted this notice in the local papers:

To the good people of Austin:

I have been solicited by a number of good citizens to become candidate for city marshal. No man from the highest to the humblest can charge me with dishonor or dishonesty. I can truthfully say that I have always been the friend of the weak, and most of the difficulties attending the independent life I have led were incurred by sensitive love of fair play and an impulse to protect the timid and the weak. I have a family of interesting children growing up. . . . No good and law abiding citizen shall have occasion to regret electing me . . . the lawless will take warning.

Respectfully, your obedient servant,
Ben Thompson.

Ben launched his active candidacy with a couple of quarts of hard liquor the following week. His zeal for clearing up Austin, plus the liquor, resulted in an immediate crusade without the benefit or sanction of the law. Ben had sold out his interest in the Senate Gambling Halls; now he decided the place must close, along with all the others in town.

The papers tell best of his efforts.

Ben Thompson, single-handed and alone, last night effected what the combined authorities of the city and county have so long failed to accomplish. Ben decided the keno games over the Iron Front should be closed, so he raided the game. In walked Benjamin, and, drawing his pistol, began firing into the "globe". There was a stampede from the house and, of course, keno was busted. Ben put an end to the gambling there; we are glad for the fathers and mothers of the young men who gambled their hard earnings. Yet the conduct of Ben Thompson is inexcusable. The rights of property are sacred as the rights of life, and the owner had a right to expect protection of the law against this wanton destruction.

But it seems that Ben has got all the officers bulldozed. When it is known that he is in one of his defiant, reckless moods, the officers invariably give him a wide berth. They actually avoid him and run like craven cowards. It seems that Ben ordered the officers to let him alone, in case he became a little playful with his musical pistol. On either of the nights

he has been rampaging and raising hell he could have been arrested. Special police were appointed to make the arrest; they saw Ben shooting around generally, sometimes afoot, then in the saddle, then in his carriage . . . the special police hurried to their homes and went to bed.

To give the proper atmosphere to his crusade, Ben had decked himself out in clothes that he thought a reformer might wear. In his somber garb he ran afoul of some boys from over on the San Saba in town for the night. They were out for a little fun themselves and did not know or recognize the solemn gentleman who came down Congress Avenue, top-hatted, frock-coated, swinging a gold-headed cane.

The boys decided to have some fun, so one of them knocked the high hat into the gutter. Ben took the joke good-naturedly, got the hat and put it back on. Then the same youngster crunched it down on the head of the wearer; still the solemn crusading gentleman did nothing. But when they knocked the hat off again and stamped on it, Ben decided the joke had gone far enough.

"Do you know whose hat you've just stomped in the mud?" asked Ben.

"Don't know, Parson, and don't give a damn," replied the rowdy.

"Maybe not, son, but you've got a little surprise coming. Where you from?"

"Over in the San Saba country—whoopie!"

"Sure enough? Well, I've got some friends over that way and I want them to know you met me. I'm Ben Thompson."

A half dozen mouths flew open; the little crowd of revelers began to fade away. Out came Ben's six-shooter.

"Stand still, son," he said to the leader; "I won't hurt you much; just want to crop you so you'll remember meeting Ben." The lad faced Ben; the revolver roared; the boy was neatly nicked in the left ear.

With his home town now in fairly good moral shape, Ben decided he would take

a trip back to Kansas City. No train being due to leave that night, Ben went down to the roundhouse, persuaded a crew to man an engine for him, and, again riding the cowcatcher, had a great time until he fell asleep, when a tolerant engineer took him in the cab and then put him to bed up the line.

Ben's political debut, begun so auspiciously, dwindled and almost died; in the voting two months later, however, he received more than nine hundred votes, even though he was absent.



BEN RETURNED to Austin in time for the Christmas holidays.

On his arrival back in town various business men and joint keepers took steps to prevent a recurrence of a Thompsonian crusade, in case the capricious Ben should decide on another. Many of the more hardy among them, despairing of the local police force, had obtained officers' commissions for themselves and their employees.

Mark Wilson, hard-boiled Irish proprietor of the Senate Bar and Variety Show, secured for himself a commission, two six-shooters, and a sawed-off shotgun; he secured for his head bartender a similar commission and a similar arsenal; he also had the mayor detail two special police to help him keep the peace.

Wilson had been warned that Thompson was particularly vicious against places in which women were permitted to hustle, and he, an old head, was determined to run his business as he had always done. He had only been in Austin a few months, but he had heard plenty about Austin's famous gun-thrower.

Christmas Eve fulfilled all gloomy anticipations at Mark Wilson's Variety Show and Saloon.

But, as evidence from all sources later proved, Ben was not rampaging this night. He was not drinking to any

extent; he was not even playful. Yet swift tragedy was to follow.

A show troupe was presenting "East Lynne"; the house was crowded.

Ben entered and took a seat on a drinking table just to the left of the stage and across the room from the long bar.

Mark Wilson was behind the scenes, assisting in getting the show started, when some reveler set off a bunch of fire crackers under a chair. Wilson rushed out in front of the curtain and another of the playful celebrants dabbed a handful of black paint over his florid face; the usual rowdyism was under way.

One of the special police arrested the lad who set off the fireworks and was leading him outside when Ben intervened.

"If you'll let that boy go, I'll see that he behaves the rest of the night and then reports to the mayor in the morning," said Ben. There is no evidence that the special policeman protested, or that there was any argument. But Wilson was riled already and had heard that some one would have to kill Ben Thompson.

Wilson now darted back into the wings and appeared with a shotgun.

"Clear that aisle by Ben Thompson," he roared. "This is his time to go!"

As the audience melted away from Ben, Wilson fired once, shot too low, and only a few buckshot found lodgment in Ben's thighs.

Ben's deadly revolver roared three times and Mark Wilson slumped down dead.

Chris Matthews, behind the bar, swung his shotgun into action, but before he could fire he also dropped, mortally wounded. The special police melted away with the crowd and Ben Thompson was alone with the actors and actresses huddled behind the scenes.

Ben surrendered. He was placed in jail that night and held without bond at a hearing the next morning before

Justice of the Peace Fritz Tegener. Within a few days he was released on \$5,000 bond, after a hearing on a writ of habeas corpus. He stood trial that fall and was acquitted, evidence showing conclusively that he was in no manner the aggressor—just a bad bet to go up against at any time.



BEN AGAIN ran for city marshal in the city election of 1882 and triumphed. The following item in the *Statesman* shows Ben going about his official duties:

A Chicago lawyer was taking depositions on Wednesday before the United States commissioner in a suit about some barbed wire fence, when Marshal Ben Thompson was sworn and examined. The Chicago lawyer sought to discredit Ben's testimony by asking some questions about his past. This led to a general muss and inkstands, paper-weights, and bottles flew about terrible. The lawyer was not fatally hurt. Texas is the land of the free and the home of the brave.

The Texas press roundly criticized the Austin citizenry for electing to high office a man of Ben Thompson's notorious character, but Austin stood by its famed citizen and the defense of Ben Thompson became one of the raging issues of the day. The net result was to serve a warning to rowdies and bad men that Austin was now under control and a good place to miss when bent on hell-raising; the bad men took the hint and Austin became Texas' most law-abiding city.

There is no doubt at all but that Ben now felt his responsibility to his friends who so valiantly upheld his attempt to get back to sane living and respectability. So far as the records show, and so far as old timers recall, Ben now shelved his turbulence, cut out the booze, and tried to become a good family man and a conscientious officer of the law.

He kept his good resolves until June,

when he visited San Antonio on official business. While in the Alamo City he met many friends; one drink led to another, and presently Ben was in Jack Harris' notorious gambling and vice den, bucking Jack's monte game.

Ben lost heavily; Jack ran a game that no one beat. Ben caught the dealer, Joe Foster, putting a fast one to him and then Ben went on the prod and did something that had never been done before—he turned the Jack Harris dive inside out; he smashed the furniture; he

horses and mules—"wet," legitimate, tame, wild, branded, unbranded—anyway.

Jack Harris had handled this trade. His little two-story joint on the corner of Soledad Street and Main Plaza was, for all practical purposes, a fortress, manned by seasoned gunmen. The fact that Ben Thompson took it in and then turned it out is a tribute only to his prowess when under full steam; it was no indication that any one else could do it. Ben couldn't do it again, so every one



demolished the bar. Then he caught a train and returned to Austin. But before he went friends warned him that he was marked for slaughter if he ever stepped inside Jack Harris' place again.

Jack Harris was a big man in San Antonio at that time; he was a power in local politics, virtually controlling the mongrel, underworld vote. He was a hard man and ran a place for hard customers, of which San Antonio had more just then than possibly any city of equal size on the American continent.

The ancient city of the Alamo was now the horse and mule capital of the world; traders and buyers from as far away as England and France were here by the hundreds; gold flowed freely to thousands of hard men who secured

said, and the saying reached Ben's ears.

The Texas legislature, then in session, left Austin on a special train the afternoon of Friday, July 11, 1882, for a week-end trip to Laredo. At the request of some of the solons, Ben accompanied them, the party arriving in San Antonio late that afternoon.

While at the station friends warned Ben that he would not be safe on the streets of San Antonio; the word was out to get him on sight. This, of course, decided Ben not to continue to Laredo; he was bound to investigate this danger.

On his drive from the station he stopped for many drinks; when he arrived on Main Plaza he was his old roaring, bellowing, terrorizing self. He

serenaded Jack Harris' place from all sides.

"Come on out, you yeller-bellied dogies that's been livin' off of women; come out and fight like men!"

No one came out, so Ben went inside and ordered a drink at the crescent-shaped bar.

"Where's all these damn killers hid-in'?" he roared. Ben now had a good audience; the plaza was banked with people at a safe distance.

"Stick around, *hombre*," said the bar-keep. "They'll accommodate you pretty soon."

Jack Harris had been at home on Ben's arrival. Notified of his presence, Jack hurried to his joint.

As Ben went out through the swinging door to the south, Jack entered from the Soledad Street door, to the east, hurried to the ticket office, secured his sawed-off shotgun and took a position behind the cover of a Venetian blind, giving him a sweep of the south door. His other men flew to arms now that the leader was in place; Billy Sims came to life upstairs; Joe Foster and two special police got set.

Ben stepped outside.

"Where's Jack Harris?" he roared.

"He just stepped in at that other door," a bystander informed him.

Ben kicked open the swinging door.

The Venetian blind fluttered as Jack Harris brought his shotgun to play on Ben. Three times Ben's deadly revolver roared and Jack Harris, the prize bad man of the Alamo City, slumped down dead. In a jiffy, Ben Thompson had the place to himself.

Ben surrendered to Phil Shardien, city marshal, was placed in the Old Bat Cave, San Antonio's famed jail, where he was held without bond.

This killing stirred San Antonio as no other killing in its long, bloody history had done. Jack Harris had power, money and friends and they now moved

heaven and earth to convict Ben Thompson by employing the following special prosecutors: Judge Thomas J. Devine, Maj. T. T. Teel, Tarleton & Boone, Anderson & Anderson, Fred Wallace, prosecutor from the district to the west, beside the local prosecutor, Fred Cocke.

The excitement was unabated for months. Finally, late the following year, Ben was brought to trial and was acquitted! But he had spent eighteen months in the San Antonio Bat Cave, had resigned as city marshal of Austin, and all his high hopes of reforming had vanished.

CHAPTER VII

TRAIL'S END



THE FENCE cutting, the vandalism, the bloodshed that barbed wire brought to Medina county almost proved the old stockman's saying that "ba'b wire shore played hell with Texas." In no other part of the state did the introduction of wire fencing create more strife and leave a bloodier trail than it did in the county adjoining Bexar to the west.

During 1883 conditions in the war-torn county grew steadily worse, and early in 1884 control of the local affairs almost passed out of the local officers' hands. The factions by this time had organized into compact fighting units, and the casualty list steadily mounted and included more than one officer.

It was at this critical time that appeal was made to the United States Marshal, Hal Gosling, for reinforcements. He answered by naming as a deputy one Edwin Vance.

Deputy Vance, in turn, called to his assistance King Fisher, deputy sheriff of Uvalde county; and presently a degree of order was restored rapidly in Medina county, without the firing of another shot, and without the sacrifice of another life. Vance reckoned correctly that the

very magic of King Fisher's name was all that was needed.

The Federal grand jury in San Antonio returned a number of indictments growing out of the disturbances to the west; and some of the cases were docketed for trial in the spring term of the local Federal court in 1884.

Thus it happened that the Medina county officers, Vance, Fisher, and Fred Niggle, marshal, were in San Antonio the second week in March of that year.

On Thursday night, March 10, the local court recessed over the weekend. Friday morning, with no work in sight for a day or so, the three officers, at the suggestion of Marshall Niggle, decided to go to Austin and collect \$500 reward money which they claimed for conviction of two fence cutters.

The trip to the capital was more of a holiday, sight-seeing excursion; in addition to the three visiting officers, the party included Marshal Gosling, Fred Bader and Joe Shealy.

They left on the morning train and arrived in Austin shortly before noon. And down at the station the party met Ben Thompson.

Ben, with a flourish, delivered to the visiting group the keys to the city.

"It's yours for the day," he declared, "and your money is all counterfeit."

It was quite a gala occasion for Ben. Only a few weeks earlier a jury in San Antonio had acquitted him on a murder charge in connection with the death of Jack Harris.

At Miller's livery stable, Ben hired his favorite team of spirited bays and turned them over to his guests.

Within an hour or so after arrival of the San Antonio party, it became apparent that Ben was out for a large day. In his later years he had developed a weakness for the glossy "stovepipe" hats then in vogue. Ordinarily, Ben wore the five-gallon hat of the stockman; when, however, he was in a more jovial mood, he invariably secured one of these two-

foot silk toppers. Austin, Laredo, or Dodge City had learned to expect bewildering happenings when Ben Thompson appeared on the streets arrayed in one of these silk hats.

By noon Ben was lashing his bays up and down Capitol Avenue, his big dog, Chico, on the seat beside him; and atop his shaggy, abnormally wide head the silk hat perched.

Ben had developed the art of having a good time to a fine point, and in his frolics the tall hat played a rather odd part. One of his pranks was to insert his knife through the crown, leaving an inch or so of the point protruding. To start off an introduction, Ben would then bow low to the person he had selected as his partner; and, apparently losing his balance, would topple and lunge forward. His new acquaintance would always appear surprised when the knife point stuck him. Some, not knowing who their playful friend was, objected to this crude humor; but those who knew Ben Thompson always tried to laugh it off. It was far safer.

Dad Wahrenberger's saloon was the seat of the day's festivities; and in it and around it the visitors milled as their exuberant host entertained them with a typical Ben Thompson party, with Ben doing most of the two-fisted drinking.

As for King Fisher, he took cigars for the most part. Never a heavy drinker, this fabulous figure from the Nueces brush country was, in his general deportment, the direct opposite of the Austin wildcat. In their extended careers along the frontier, King Fisher and Ben Thompson had been thrown quite a bit together and were regarded as friends. And, in achievements and reputation, King was second only to Ben.

When in the right mood, Ben frequently would speculate on the time when he might possibly add to his collection of scalps that of King Fisher. Today he again broached the subject.

"If I'd get you, King," Ben roared, pounding the table, "that'd fix my rep for all time. Some day I think I'll try it."

"That'd be plain suicide, Ben," King Fisher counseled. And then, as one gun fighter to another, King explained one of Ben's weaknesses that apparently no one else had noticed.

"At least thirty seconds before you get ready to kill, Ben," King said, "your eyes pop like flint. I've seen others with that same failing, and I always watch the other fellow's eyes. If your eyes ever pop twice while you are facing me, I'll kill you."



EVEN BEFORE the killing of Jack Harris, Ben had been for many years a sort of an inter-city issue. San Antonio had been "Ben Thompsoned" on more than one occasion when the pride of Austin visited down that way. And when he stormed the Harris gambling house alone, turned it inside out and killed the local big man, Ben assured himself of abundant trouble any time he came down there.

The fact that Harris died with a sawed-off shotgun in his hand, and was facing Ben, mattered little except to get Ben an acquittal. Harris left behind him a corps of able lieutenants who promptly warned Ben never to again come near the Harris place.

Therefore, when Ben announced his intention of returning to San Antonio with the visiting party, he got only discouragement from every one.

The train for San Antonio left Austin at four o'clock; and long before that hour the six visitors were devising ways to catch the train and leave Ben in Austin.

They sneaked away one at a time and went to the station. To Deputy Vance fell the task of diverting Thompson's mind until the train pulled out. Vance walked him up Capitol Avenue, unhitched the team and bays and with

Thompson returned them to Miller's stables. Here Vance was able to slip away. He hurried to the station in time to catch the train as it pulled out, and it appeared that all was well.

The train backed out of the station, crept across the bridge and made the customary stop at a suburban station in the edge of Austin. Just as it got under way again, Vance heard a commotion down the road from Austin. Looking, he saw a cloud of dust; and from it emerged the team of bays in a wild gallop, with Ben Thompson standing in the seat of the careening buggy, lashing them with a whip. He overhauled the train, pulled the buggy up alongside the rear platform and leaped, landing on his hands and knees, but safely aboard. As the driverless bays came to a prancing halt, Ben began making himself at home.

When the train arrived in San Antonio three hours later, Ben had used his hat-and-knife trick in so many informal introductions that only the brim of the silk topper remained, and this he wore sometimes as a hat and more often as a collar. The return had been exclusively a Ben Thompson excursion. Ben had brought aboard an ample supply of liquid refreshments, and he was by now entirely out of control.

Any one versed in reading the signs of that day could have predicted a stormy night for San Antonio. And none of the local party had bargained for what was now in store.

Marshal Hal Gosling, accordingly, called Phil Sharden, San Antonio's chief of police, and notified him. Sharden acted promptly; he revoked all leaves of absence; kept his day police on duty for the night; and, as a final precaution, sent an extra detail of three officers for duty at the Harris place.

As for their part, the honkatonk managers, Billy Simms and Joe Foster, "fortified" the Old Jack Harris Variety show for Ben Thompson. They reasoned that the Austin bearcat was inevitably bound to try and take them in sometime during

the evening. And they made elaborate plans to kill him when he did.

In a curtained box of the show the managers stationed Larry McLaughlin, a part-time bartender and all round killer; Harry Tremaine, an actor of parts with slick, oily hair, and a way with women—one of the vermin that Ben Thompson hated above all living creatures; and a drifting gunman known only as Canada Bill.

McLaughlin was armed with a thirty-thirty carbine. Tremaine had a .44 Winchester. Canada Bill had a rim-fire Henry rifle.

Their orders were simple.

"Kill Ben Thompson when he enters."



JUST HOW much money the killers got will never be known. An old ex-ranger, who should know, has said the assassins were promised \$5,000 for a neat job, but actually were paid only fifty dollars around. Sporting men and gamblers in the know placed the figure at \$1,000 to be cut three or four ways, according to those who claim that a fourth man was also in the assassination.

As the returning party were making ready to disperse at the local railroad station on Austin Street. Ben observed an Austin party preparing to board a train here. Ben hailed them, and with a notebook and pencil "interviewed" them to get "an item for his paper."

As they were parting, one of the women in the party cautioned Ben against "going around that Harris place." This reference was interpreted by Ben as a challenge. Had there been any previous likelihood of keeping him away from the place, the woman's remark at the station had dissolved all doubts; she had planted in his inflamed brain seed that was to speedily bear fruit.

Vance and the other officers now washed their hands of Ben. They felt that in notifying the local police they had done all they could. Only one of

them really knew Ben and that was King Fisher.

Therefore, King volunteered to go with Ben and try to get him quieted and get him to bed. The others took cabs from the station, but King walked Ben up and got him stopped on Alamo Plaza. There he induced Ben to eat a hearty supper; and with that over he took Ben to Turner Hall to see the current show.

Until ten o'clock it appeared that the night was to pass off more or less quietly and the expected turmoil averted. Then Ben roused himself and, brushing aside the counsel of King, started across town to Main Plaza with the announced intention of seeing the vaudeville and variety show in the Harris place.

At ten-thirty-five, Ben and King arrived and entered the Soledad Street door of the Jack Harris Variety Show and Gambling Palace. Ben then bought two tickets to the show upstairs.

At the top of the stairs an attendant requested them to check their guns.

"A new house rule," he said. "All guests must check their guns."

Ben snorted his refusal on general principles. King refused because of the fact that he was an officer. Finally the pair were admitted.

Thompson and Fisher walked upstairs and took seats in the balcony. From a blond beer hustler Thompson ordered a drink and King Fisher took a cigar.

Thompson then sent for Billy Simms, who was the main manager of the place since the death of Jack Harris. Joe Foster, another partner, was seated a few rows down nearer the stage.

Joe Foster and King Fisher were warm friends. When McNelly's rangers put King Fisher in the San Antonio jail, Joe Foster for several weeks paid for the extra meals served him from the restaurant. Joe Foster liked and admired the fabulous terror of the upper Nueces country, as did many another man who knew King Fisher.

Billy Simms obeyed the Thompson summons and came, taking a seat between King Fisher and Ben Thompson.

Then King Fisher called to his good friend, Joe Foster:

"Come up here, Joe; I want you to meet my friend, Ben Thompson."

"I've met him," Foster said.

"Have a drink," King Fisher invited.

"No."

"Have a smoke."

"No."

Then Joe Foster arose, his face flushed.

"I don't drink nor smoke with them kind of damn cattle," he said, pointing to Thompson. "He killed my best friend, Jack Harris—"

A Ben Thompson roar filled the house and electrified the air. The beer hustling girls ducked for cover.

Joe Foster streaked for his gun.

Ben Thompson had his gun in his hand, but Jacob Coy, policeman, grabbed Ben's arm as his gun roared and Joe Foster slumped with a bullet through his left knee.

King Fisher, the volunteer peace-maker, pushed Coy aside and grabbed his rowdy friend, Ben Thompson. King never made a play for his gun.

Then the concealed assassins let the clenched pair have the works.

From the curtained box rifles spouted a steady flame. Ben was shot nine times in the right side, between the forehead and the thigh; King Fisher was shot seven times, the first bullet entering the left side of his brown beaver hat just above the bow.

Then one of the paid killers clambered out of concealment, walked over and put a bullet through the left eye of each writhing figure. He was paid to do a neat and a thorough job and you could not take chances with men like Ben Thompson and King Fisher.

From three blocks down Commerce

Street, a reporter from the *Express* was rushed to the scene and found this:

When your reporter reached the scene the two bodies were weltering in blood, and were laid out side by side, their hair and faces carmined with the life fluid. The stairs leading up to the scene of the horror were as slippery as ice and the walls were stained and the floor tracked with bloody footprints.

Dissolute white-faced women crowded around with exclamations and broken sobs. "Which is Ben Thompson?" they asked. "And which is King Fisher?" Thus, even in death, the grim reputation of the men stood forth strong as ever.

Thompson is shot twice through the brain. . . . King Fisher is also shot through the brain. . . . He was deputy sheriff of Uvalde County, is about 27 years of age . . . has a wife and family. . . . He lay with his arm across Ben's body, as though unwilling in death to desist from the desperate defense of his friend. . . .

Deputy Marshal Ed Vance and Fred Niggli were in their hotel across the plaza when the killing took place. Vance rushed to the scene and arrived before the bodies were moved. He is still living in San Antonio and is believed to be the only survivor of that fateful party.

He says he found the guns of King Fisher still in their holsters, with neither showing evidence of having been fired.

And thus was written on March 11, 1885, the most talked of and the most memorable chapter in San Antonio history since the fall of the Alamo.

Ben Thompson and King Fisher lived at a time when only men of their type climbed to the top. Both men still have more friends than critics in Texas. Both men left families. Both men were high-handed and reckless. Both were swept up in a stream of violent, surging life as it was on the old frontiers.

But they lived by the gun and by the gun they perished, even though each of them was entitled to a more honorable death.

THE END

THE CAMP-FIRE



Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

W REDVERS DENT is known to Camp-Fire readers under his pen-name, Redvers. His first story appeared in our magazine in 1929, under the title, "Cry Havoc", the serial version of his book "Show Me Death". There was considerable comment at the time as to its authenticity. The argument was nipped in the bud by the fact that the Imperial War Museum of Britain asked for a copy of the book to be placed in the Archives of the museum, being the only war novel of its type so honored. Then the "Bibliothèque et Musée de la Guerre" of Paris asked for copies of the magazine which contained the story "Cry Havoc" to be placed in their Museum.

Today, in the French War Museum in Paris, those copies of *Adventure* are placed among their archives as authentic war documents. French historians of the future will be studying the magazine to gain data on the Great War.

W. Redvers Dent is thirty-five years of age and has led rather a busy life. In 1915 he ran away to enlist in the Canadian Army and saw service for eighteen months in France, being in the battles of Sanctuary Woods, the Somme, Vimy Ridge, Hill Seventy and Paschendaele. In 1918 he was given leave to Canada and later was transferred to the Siberian Expedition, seeing service on the Siberian front for six months. He was invalided home in 1919 and was given one year to live.

After taking on various selling jobs, he took up his schooling where he had left off, and entered the Episcopalian ministry, and in 1927, after many happy years in the Ministry, his health began to break down again. It was at this period that he started to write and, after the success of "Cry Havoc", decided to take up writing as a profession, his health not permitting his continuance in the Ministry.

He says he made the discovery that one of the worst things that can happen to a writer is immediate success. To quote him: "I had to learn writing from the ground up and for the last five years I have been engaged in that and am now slowly coming back. I married in 1921, have five children and live at Port Sydney, Muskoka. I hope someday to be a writer."

ON Armistice Day, R. A. Marr, Jr., professor of civil engineering at Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Va., sits down and writes the following letter. It's the kind of letter we don't print here often (if we did, you might accuse us of being prejudiced in favor of ourselves) but such letters always send a warm feeling around the editorial staff, and editing looks like a good business. I guess an editor is lucky—he gets his share of criticism all right, quick and vigorous, but he also gets letters like this one. My sympathy goes to the men—

and there are many—who work in an unbroken silence about their jobs, whether their work is good or bad, having to assume from the silence that it must be all right, or adequate, good enough. That system seems better suited to a battery of machines than to human beings.

I have read *Adventure* many years and got a real kick when I picked up the anniversary edition and found "Galloping Guns," by Arthur D. Howden Smith, based on the desertion of a V.M.I. Cadet to join up with Chew's Battery.

Strangely, November 11th is our "Founder's Day" so today we are holding a joint celebration. As you may know this small school gave over two thousand officers to the forces of the United States in the late war.

May I say that you publish a very wonderful magazine. It is the finest magazine that a youngster could lay his hands on. I am a very unorthodox college professor and insist on my students reading much beside text books, and "plug" *Adventure* to them, particularly your excellent *Ask Adventure* service.

If at any time you are in this region, please come by and let me show you a school that tries to teach character and manhood. Today my thoughts turned to some of the "very gallant gentlemen" that I knew in '17-'18 and I wanted to write a line of appreciation to the magazine that stands for all they represented.

Sincerely,

—R. A. Marr, Jr.,

Prof. Civil Engineering.

SOMEWHERE I once read an article on the ten most intelligent animals. I think the elephant was rated first, the monkey second, the dog third or fourth, the horse about fifth or sixth. Also I saw a movie of monkeys being caught by rice in hollowed cocoanut shells, something I had heard but regarded only as a good story. But they thrust their fists into the holes in the shells and couldn't get them out because they wouldn't let go of their handfuls of rice. Here an ex-navy officer tells us of a monkey on a ship that figured things out to a point, but then always got stumped.

Having read your magazine from the time they brought out Volume One, down to and including the present day, (E. & O. E.) which means when I was in France and couldn't buy it, I think I rate the same distinction of the rest of the old-timers who write *Camp-Fire* again and anon.

I get an awful kick from the Tough Bos'n and the ship's mascot, the monk. The first one was the monk showing Bos'n how to tie knots. But the first prize goes to Mister Monk for swiping the paint pot and getting into the ventilator and cussing out Bos'n when he comes around and sees what has happened to his paint work. Second prize goes to Bos'n for buying the "monkey on a string" on the last number. Man, it's happened.

The artist on Mr. Monk has a wicked imagination. If he wants it, I'll tell him about the famous monk on the *Niagara* that used to climb the mast and when they yanked on his chain he used to pull it up, but he never could fathom the idea of belaying the end. So as he pulled, he paid out on what he collected, and to hear him swear when somebody yanked again on the bight, was funny. You can prove this story by writing to R. H. O'Brien, who was a Canal Pilot at Panama, the last I heard of him. He was "Exec" on the *Niagara* during the war, and it was his monkey.

Likewise, who was it in the *Ask Adventure* that was such a whizzer of a small boat man? He made a cruise to the Bahamas one time in about a 14-foot boat. Anyway, here's the story. On that trip he ran out of water and was darned hard up for everything and all at once along came a craft, (no lights) and he croaked out, "Ship ahoy, what ship is that?" And the answer was: "This is the Suicide Club." It was the same R. H. O'Brien who answered the hail. That incident was written up in *Camp-Fire* some years ago, and the small boat man told it, but I never did see any answer as to his knowing what ship it was. O'Brien told it to me years before when he was Executive Officer and I was First Lieutenant in one of the *Santa's* in the Cruiser and Transport Force. We were darned proud of our service in that outfit.

If you print any of this, leave the name off. But you might say that I'd like to hear from any and all of the crew on the "*Santa Cecelia*" C. & T. F., U. S. N. who was fondly known as the "101 Ranch" to her personnel, enlisted, rated, and commissioned.

R. E. PEACHEY, of Greenhithe, New Zealand, also has a comment on

the monkey but adds a note of sympathy. Incidentally, a copy of the cover has been sent to Mr. Peachey. Please don't any of the rest of you ask—there are none left.

With regard to the cover depicting the sailor and the monkey, I think that the remarks of J. H. Mitchell are particularly apt. In the course of my career as a yachtsman, lasting about five weeks in 1922, I found quite as much difficulty with knots as our sailor friend seems to be having; while the monkey's expression shows that he is obviously the teacher, and cannot understand the difficulty experienced by the sailor. I may say that I practised the knots on any kind of rope, cord, or twine that I could find so I don't think that the kind of cord used amounts to a dot in the argument. While on the subject, is there any chance of my getting hold of a copy of the picture? It seems to be just the kind that would appeal to the children of my class at school. My copy of the magazine has gone on its travels to the Leper Island with the cover intact through an oversight. All my copies are sent there when finished with, as the exiles upon that island have little to do but read in their spare time.

AN ex-Foreign Legion comrade gives us a new reason why Legionnaires prefer Lebel rifles—from J. Arthur, Johnson City, Tennessee.

The remarks about Georges Surdez by Gifford S. Chamberlain are an irresistible temptation for me to drop a bundle of sticks into the Camp-Fire.

First, let me tell the cockeyed world that Surdez knows the Legion—quite as well as I know the Legion of 1917-19.

His statement about the fusil mitrailleur Chauchard is absodarnlutely correct; he even spells Chauchard correctly, and many a *sergeant-fourrier* spelled it Chauchat on his requisition lists.

Another thing Surdez knows is that the Chauchard sounded different from the Lebels, even when used as a single-shooter. There are two reasons for it. First, while the caliber was the same as that of the Lebel, the cartridge case was slightly larger and contained heavier powder load, than the rifle cartridges, as we learned quite early in the game, when some dumb bunny sent us a mess of Chauchard cartridges to use in the Lebels. Second, the Chauchard had a short funnel-

like shield fastened to the muzzle, to shield the flash, and the report naturally echoed from this sheet-steel shield.

Only in one instance did Surdez slip up—when he stated that the Lebel uses a loading clip, of five cartridges for the rifle, and three for the carbine. It's the other way around. All the rifles I have ever seen took three-cartridge clips, as did practically all of the carbines. Late in 1918 some of the men on returning from the non-commissioned officers' school at Saint Maxient brought with them carbines made for five-cartridge clips, but had to use three-cartridge clips in them, as five-cartridge clips were never issued in our outfit.

As to the tubular type of Lebel, it is true that Legionnaires prefer them. Anybody who got hold of one could always swap it for a clip type of rifle, and get plenty of *pinard*.

A SCORPION can't sting itself to death, says James B. Sumner, of Ithaca, New York, apropos of a Camp-Fire discussion recently. And neither, says he, can a cobra.

Recently I read the statement that if a scorpion is placed within a ring of glowing coals, at first it tries desperately to escape; then, finding this to be impossible, it commits suicide by stinging itself. Your readers may be interested to learn that this myth was disproved in 1887 by A. G. Bourne, while living in India. He describes in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society*, volume 42, page 17, how he used three species of scorpions in his research and found that not only was suicide never attempted but that scorpions are immune to their own stings, and to those of another scorpion, just as a cobra is unaffected by its own bite or by the bite of another cobra.

—JAMES B. SUMNER, Ithaca, N. Y.

SOME of the men who fought in armor had about as much mobility as the Statue of Liberty, but Dr. Fred G. Whamond, of Chicago, quotes history to tell us there were exceptions—mighty men who perhaps got around with as much ease in iron suits as some of our citizens do on a golf course.

King James V of Scotland was able to leap into his saddle with full armor on. The Earl of Crawford (Beardie Crawford), was also able to do that and did it in London, to

show he was not chained to his saddle while in combat. King James V was a splendid athlete, and wrestled with his subjects when in disguise. He also went into arenas with a skin over him and a club in his hand, challenging anyone to combat on horse or foot, armed as they pleased.

Ripley, in his "Believe It or Not" pictures, has Rob Roy in full armor. Rob was proscribed and hunted as an outlaw and certainly would not be likely to carry a full suit of armor when his life depended on speed. Rob never saw a full suit of armor likely. The Scot (Scottish Highlander) depended upon speed, not armor, in his fighting. James Graham, Marquis of Montrose, a brilliant leader of mobile forces in the Seventeenth Century, may have worn armor at times, but at one time his Scots were facing a body of mailed cavalry, regarding them dubiously, doubtful of smashing them. Montrose said, "Gentlemen, let us fight them in our shirt sleeves." They smashed up the armored horsemen.

The English people and Knights thought Crawford was a wizard when he leaped from and into his saddle in armor. An armored knight could hardly rise when he fell with or off his horse, and so was liable to be robbed and even his throat cut by camp followers after a battle. The Scots (Highlanders) could march thirty miles and fight a battle afterwards. Could they possibly do that with armor?

GOOD letters have come in from these Camp-Fire comrades, and I wish to acknowledge them:

R. N. Cliequennot, Albany, N. Y.; J. J. Faulkner, Hastings, H. B.; Wilbur F. H. Radeline, Fort Armstrong, Honolulu, Hawaii; Charles N. Brinkman, Santa Clara, California; Thomas Q. Lempertz, Cleveland, Ohio; Frank R. Farnham, Boston, Mass.; N. O. Fox, Birmingham, Ala.; Michael Koval, Mammoth Cave, Kentucky; William A. Bewie, Maplewood, New Jersey; Dr. E. E. Rosaire, Houston, Texas; Joseph Higgins, New York City; E. F. Mayne, Grosse Ile, Michigan; Paul Sevender, Houston, Texas; George B. Claett, 2nd, Troy, N. Y.

STRANGE how little things make us form international likes and dislikes. Some of you will find your feelings mixed over the Ethiopia yarn in this issue. I assume that because of a similar reaction of my own.

A friend told me of a British friend—a very British friend—who arrived in New York recently in a state of considerable misery. The man had worked in Bogota for several years, had belonged to a club there where members did not pay cash across the bar for their drinks. The bartender just placed the cost on their accounts.

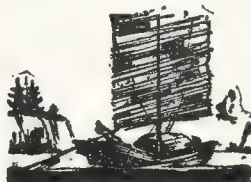
Coming north, his ship stopped at Havana. At a bar there he met two Boston chappies. They were deuced fine fellows. They asked him to have a drink. He accepted. He asked them to have a drink. They accepted. His fellow-feeling for Americans increased; he hoped they felt the same way about him. Then he looked at his watch.

There was just time for him to catch his ship. The steamer was sliding past Morro Castle, and he was still beaming over his pleasant talk with the Americans when a sudden realization smote him as he stood at the rail. He hadn't paid for his round of drinks. He'd just walked out and left the bill.

He hadn't given payment a thought because he had been so long in the habit of having it charged to him without a word spoken about it.

He feels worse about it than necessary, perhaps, but he liked those Boston men and kicks himself all over the lot when he wonders if they're saying: "Englishmen?" Snort. "We met one in Havana, and he, etc . . ."

H. B.





ASK ADVENTURE

information you can't get elsewhere

TALL tales from the captain's table—
about Madagascar.

Request:—Recently, in conversation, a ship's captain gave a glowing account of the underdeveloped gold resources of Madagascar. The natives, he claimed, all carried a poke of bullion. This captain also said the highest part was a vast table land covered with a rank growth of wild grass, and that millions of wild cattle roamed the plains. Are these things true?

—D. A. Hatfield,
Downieville, Calif.

Reply by Mr. Ralph Linton:—I am afraid that your friend, the ship's captain, was stringing you. There is some gold in Madagascar, and both natives and white prospectors carry on rather unproductive placer mining for it. None of the white prospectors I met was able to make more than a bare living. There have been no rich strikes, in spite of the fact that prospecting has been going on for at least forty years. I understand that intensive prospecting has been going on recently under government auspices, but with no important results.

The island is under French control and it is rather difficult for a foreigner to get a prospector's license or to prove up on claims. Mining laws are much like those of the United States.

The interior is a table land with good pasture and plenty of cattle, but the cattle are all owned and about as wild as our own range cattle. Ranching is left to the natives, the whites having found that they could not compete successfully. The natives are shrewd traders with a good knowledge of money values. In the time I was there I never met one who carried gold and if they did they would know exactly what it was worth.

CAT-CLIMBING a cliff requires technical training.

Request:—What equipment is necessary for a beginning mountain climber? What other desirable? What simple advice could you give in regards to climbing? I am at home in the woods but have never done any mountain climbing.

Near where I live is a several-hundred-foot high cliff, (Pt. Grenville), almost perpendicular. I want to descend it to a cave which I know is at the bottom, but I don't know just how to go about it or if I need any equipment of any sort.

—Harry J. Pedersen,
Moclips, Wash.

Reply by Mr. T. S. Solomons:—Mountain climbing equipment, other than proper clothing and footgear, is divided into equipment for ice and snow and for rock work on steep or precipitous acclivities.

The former will not interest you at present, unless you undertake some of the more formidable facets of the Rainier glaciers. The main tools are alpenstock and rope, the latter of special make, preferably.

For ascending and descending rock faces too steep for hand-climbing (cat-climbing is the old term) you use "pitons", sort of iron pegs which are so made and attached as to enable the climber to dislodge them at will. These would, with sufficient instruction and practice, enable you to descend your rock face, provided the rock is fractured, creviced, or with partings of any sort not too perpendicularly. Describe your cliff face to the rock climbing section of the Sierra Club or your own Mazamas and they will give you further dope.

I caution you to try other places first and learn your technique. Rock climbing has come to be something more than a skilled sport—

it is almost a science in the hands of the enthusiasts. It is *not* to be picked up in a few days.

Shoes should *not* be too heavy or clumsy. You want fairly close fitting shoes or light boots, with soles just heavy enough so that rocks will not dent them and cause pain. The shoe must be as nearly as possible a mere outer casing of the foot itself. The shoe should not be able to move either sidewise or lengthwise on the foot, and there should be nothing to catch on rock edges or vegetation, sharp stiff branchlets and the like.

We don't want to turn this department into a corner for cooks, but here are two requests which have a world-wide flavor. J. Buckle, 1631-11 43rd Avenue, Flushing, Long Island, N. Y., wants a recipe for a real barbecue sauce. And Ross D. Thompson, of 4326 Forrest Lane, N. W., Washington, D. C., wants the real and authentic recipe for Indian curry.

THE CHIMNEY SWALLOW has the eagle-eye.

Request:—All my life I have known and been interested in the chimney swallow, sometimes called the swift, I believe. I have seen this swallow in Southern Jersey and Maryland country. They nest in chimneys, and usually go away in August or early September.

Where does this bird go to or migrate and how do they live in the countries they migrate to? Any information you can give me about the chimney swallow and its habits will be intensely interesting to me.

—JULES E. KENNEDY, New York, N. Y.

Reply by Mr. Davis Quinn:—No creature is so at home in the air as the soot-colored, swallow-like swift. Feeding on the wing, he literally picks insects out of the air at eighty miles an hour—a mere cruising speed for this perhaps fastest of all feathered fliers. It is said that in migration the chimney swift can cover a thousand miles a day. And there is no hawk, not even the duck hawk himself, fast enough to overtake this little fellow.

Not only will this cigar-shaped pigmy actually challenge enemies like the peregrine to catch him, but even in the face of thunder and lightning this master of the sky will not quit his element, and as a matter of fact seems to get a real kick out of riding a storm. Only when he sleeps does he abandon the heavens, to seek the inside of some great hollow tree; there, alternating with day-dozing bats, he roosts a few hours at night. But like

a true crepuscular, he is out again long before the dawn, nor does he so much as fold his wings till he roosts again with the setting sun.

Dead bodies of the swift have been found on the ground with stiffened wings spread as in flight. The bird dies as it lives, flying.

The nest is a shelf of twigs and grass cemented against the inside of a hollow tree or chimney. During the nesting period the salivary glands of this bird enlarge enormously to provide mucus enough to adhere this queer structure to a vertical surface and to hold it together. Related swifts, of the Orient, whose nests consist almost wholly of pure dried mucus, supply Eastern epicures with the prized, edible nest of commerce.

Of all the attributes of this bird, perhaps the most amazing is the fact that at eighty miles an hour he can adjust the focus of his eyes to the comparatively stationary bugs of pin-point size, which he scoops up and devours without even so much as slowing down. Fancy yourself traveling that fast in a car, approaching a sparrow, training a binocular on the sparrow, and having to accommodate the lenses! The sparrow hawk can, two hundred feet in the air, spot a small beetle on the ground. This is sight a thousand times greater than yours and mine.

In the fall the swift migrates through Mexico to Guatemala and probably to points farther south; its winter range is not definitely known but believed to be Central America. Not a great deal is known of the winter habits of this bird, although they must resemble the habits of the species as we know it in the north.

IT'S a corps park in a corps area; it's a dump in a division.

Request:—What is meant by an artillery park, and also an engineer's park? In the organization chart a corps is given one artillery park. Does the park mean just a concentration of varying numbers, or is there a certain number of officers and enlisted men and equipment assigned to each park? May I have an outline of the make-up of an artillery and engineer's park?

Also what TR in the regulations cover the correct placement of insignia on an enlisted man's blouse and an officer's shoulders?

—GEO. E. BLOMEWIST, Philadelphia, Pa.

Reply by Captain Glen B. Townsend:—In general, the military term "park" refers to a space occupied by animals, wagons, trucks, pontoons and materials of all kinds such as ammunition, engineer supplies, provisions,

etc. Formerly the term also applied to the vehicles ordinarily making up a park, such as a park of wagons, a park of artillery, etc., the number of vehicles making a park being more or less fixed by regulations. This term is obsolescent in our service. It survives only with certain restricted meanings, as in the case of "corps park" of which you speak. In the Field Artillery Field Manual, Vol. II, page 484, a corps park is defined as "a place for the temporary storage of corps supplies."

Corps parks are designated by the corps commander and usually are located in the corps area. Generally the supplies in a corps park are limited to ammunition and engineer construction materials. Except in stabilized situations the quantities of supplies stored in a corps park should not exceed the capacity of the corps trains. In the division the corresponding term is "dump."

The designation "park" has in general given way to a series of terms, each of which has a definite military meaning, such as depot, refilling point, distributing point and train bivouac.

The correct wearing of military insignia is covered by Army Regulations (not Training Regulations) 600-40, copies of which are available from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., at ten cents each.

AERIAL exploration gives a bird's-eye view and maps the grounds for an expedition afoot.

Request:—I am undertaking a specialized study of aerial exploration. Any exploration expeditions which have employed aircraft in any way in their work are of interest to me, as I wish to obtain a complete history of the accomplishments of aircraft in this field.

I am experiencing difficulty in acquiring material relative to this topic. I will appreciate any assistance you can render me in the furtherance of my knowledge of this subject.

—LAWRENCE A. BICKFORD, East St. Louis, Ill.

Reply by Mr. Robert Spiers-Benjamin:—There have been countless expeditions that used planes for exploration purposes. My files, however, do not give me a great deal of information on the subject.

As did Colonel Lindbergh, Bob Buck, prominent young American aviator, flew over Yucatan a year or so ago and made several discoveries for the University of Pennsylvania Museum. Buck's chief difficulty on this expedition was that once he had found a ruined

city from the air he was unable to find a landing spot to examine the city from the ground.

Malreaux, a Frenchman, together with a companion, recently reported the discovery of a lost city in the Arabian desert, supposedly the lost city of the Queen of Sheba. Another, Count Byron de Prorok, noted Franco-American explorer, does a great deal of exploring by air. Recently one of his expeditions found a submerged city in the Mediterranean.

Gregory Mason, an American, in 1931 or 1932, headed an expedition into Colombia. Much of this was done by plane with the co-operation of Pan American Airways.

I suppose that you have all the dope on the air expeditions of Captain Alfred Stevens. He has done some extensive work in mapping mountainous sections of South America from the air by means of aerial cameras, for the *National Geographic*.

The Shippee-Johnston expedition into Peru, several years ago, was entirely by means of airplane, and a great amount of work was accomplished. The Matthews-Stirling expedition into New Guinea, for the Smithsonian institute, was one of the first expeditions to use planes to any extent. This was about seven years ago; several well known pilots were on the staff. The outcome was pretty bad—several members died en route—and there was a tremendous amount of trouble with the planes. You can probably get more information on this expedition direct from Dr. Stirling, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D. C.

YO HO HO—but here's the actual value of those romantic coins pirates sang about.

Request:—1. What is the gold value of an old Spanish doubloon? 2. What is the antique value? 3. If a person had a few thousand dollars' worth, would the government make him turn them in as gold? 4. What is the silver value of a piece of eight? 5. What is the coin value (antique)?

—C. W. JOHNSON, So. Boca Grande, Fla.

Reply by Mr. Howland Wood:—The gold value of an old Spanish doubloon was approximately \$16.00 in the old days. This varied according to date and mintage, as they were struck at a number of mints both in Spain and in North and South America and their weight and fineness varied slightly. They, for the most part, were of 9/10 gold. Their present day value, on account of the advanced price in gold, would be about 50% more—but, as

I understand it, they can only be sent to the mint, which pays at the rate of \$20.67 per fine Troy ounce of gold content.

Their antique value, or as I suppose you mean value to collectors, would vary from about \$25.00 to \$35.00 according to mint, date and condition. A very few might be worth more. I do not think the government can make you turn them in as old gold unless in such poor condition as to have no numismatic value to coin collectors.

The silver value of a piece-of-eight would be about 9/10 of the current value for pure silver, there being 1/10 alloy in these pieces. The coin value to a collector would be anywhere from the actual silver value up to a number of dollars, according to mint, date and condition.

RAYMOND SPEARS always knows the answer!

Request:—Are the mussels found in the Southern New Jersey streams the type that produce pearls such as are produced by fresh water mussels in other sections of the country?

—HUGH MEMORTER, Woodbury, N. J.

Reply by Mr. Raymond S. Spears:—The Notch Brook pearl of New Jersey was one of the sporadic discoveries of fresh water pearls in the United States. The Queen

Pearl, I think it was, remains now one of the most beautiful of the world's pearls—a New Jersey product.

"Pearls and Pearling" by Herbert H. Verrees, Pittsfield, Ill., (\$1, I think) will put you in the way of pearling and shelling (for buttons) lore. U. S. Commissioner of Fisheries, Washington, D. C., will send you leaflets on the subject—perhaps including Jersey waters.

Shells containing pearls usually are "cripples," misshapen and distorted.

Shelling for pearls sometimes pays, if a bed is found where parasites and accidents have combined forces to produce pearls. But as shells run, perhaps one in ten thousand contains a pearl of price—\$5 up. Seeds and slugs are sold by the ounce, \$1 to a few dollars each. Pearls are the profits—buttonstock is where the wages come from. Shells selling by the ton, if a button factory is near enough to make freighting or truck-haul pay, make the mussel gatherers their money. Shellers make the price on their morning take, which may run from one hundred pounds to one thousand pounds and shells bring from \$20 to \$200 or so a ton—ornamental gun-butt inlay and knife-handle specialties being made from the latter.

The lore of pearls is fascinating, scattered and varied—sea and freshwater science, fact and fable. The search for them has made much history; the discoveries have brought both tribulation and strange exhilaration, fortune and fairyland adventure.

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Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Quartzsite, Ariz., care Conner Field.

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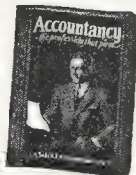
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When kidneys are clogged they become weak—the bladder is irritated—often passage is scanty and smarts and burns—sleep is restless and nightly visits to the bathroom are frequent. The right harmless and inexpensive way to stop this trouble and restore healthy action to kidneys and bladder is to get from any druggist a 35-cent box of Gold Medal Haarlem Oil Capsules and take as directed—you won't be disappointed—but be sure and get **GOLD MEDAL Haarlem Oil Capsules**—the original and genuine—right from Haarlem in Holland—a grand kidney stimulant and diuretic. Remember also that other symptoms of kidney and bladder trouble are backache, leg cramps, puffy eyes, moist palms and nervousness.



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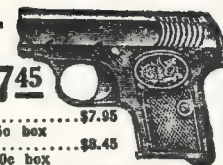
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The liver should pour out two pounds of liquid bile into your bowels daily. If this bile is not flowing freely, your food doesn't digest. It just decays in the bowels. Gas bloats up your stomach. You get constipated. Your whole system is poisoned and you feel sour, sunk and the world looks puny.

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Mrs. Dowdy of Texas, sold B. Max Mehl one-half dollar for \$400.00.

I PAID \$200.00 to J. D. Martin of Virginia For Just One Copper Cent

"Please accept my thanks for your check for \$200.00 in payment for the copper cent I sent you. I appreciate the interest you have given this transaction. It's a pleasure to do business with a firm that handles matters as you do. I wish to assure you it will be a pleasure to me to tell my friends of your wonderful offer for old coins."
Julian D. Martin, Va.

This is but one of the many similar letters I am constantly receiving. Post yourself! It pays! I paid Mr. Manning, New York, \$2,500.00 for a single silver dollar. Mrs. G. F. Adams, Ohio, received \$740.00 for some old coins. I paid W. F. Wilhelm of Pennsylvania \$13,500.00 for his rare coins. I paid J. T. Nevill, of North Dakota, \$200.00 for a \$10 bill he picked up in circulation. I paid \$1,000.00 to Mr. Brownlee of Ga., for one old coin. Mr. Brownlee, in his letter to me, says: "Your letter received with the check for \$1,000 enclosed. I like to deal with such men as you and hope you continue buying coins for a long time." In the last thirty-four years I have paid hundreds of others handsome premiums for old bills and coins.

All Kinds of Old Coins, Medals, Bills and Stamps Wanted

\$1.00 to \$1,000 paid for certain old cents, nickels, dimes, quarters, etc. Right now I will pay \$50.00 for 1913 Liberty Head nickels (not buffalo); \$100.00 for 1894 dimes, "B" Mint; \$5.00 for 1853 quarters, no arrows; \$10.00 for 1869 quarters, no motto, \$200.00 each for 1864 and 1865 Silver Trade Dollars, etc., etc.

Big Cash Premiums for Hundreds of Coins Now Circulating

There are literally thousands of old coins and bills that I want at once and for which I will pay big cash premiums. Many of these coins are now passing from hand to hand in circulation. Today or tomorrow a valuable coin may come into your possession. Watch your change. Know what to look for.

She Got \$400⁰⁰ for a Half Dollar *I will pay CASH for* **OLD COINS, BILLS and STAMPS**

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There are single pennies that sell for \$100.00. There are nickels worth many dollars—dimes, quarters, half dollars and dollars on which big cash premiums are paid. Each year a fortune is offered by collectors for rare coins and stamps for their collections. The prices paid are amazing.

It Pays to Post Yourself on the Big Values of Old Coins and Stamps

Knowing about coins pays. Andrew Henry, of Idaho, was paid \$900.00 for a half-dollar, received in change. A valuable old coin may come into your possession or you may have one now and not know it. Post yourself.

Huge Premiums for Old Stamps

Some old stamps bring big premiums. An old 10c stamp, found in an old basket, was recently sold for \$10,000.00. There may be valuable stamps on some of your old letters. It will pay you to know how to recognize them.

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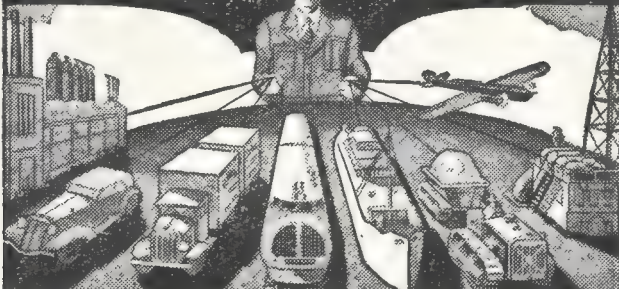
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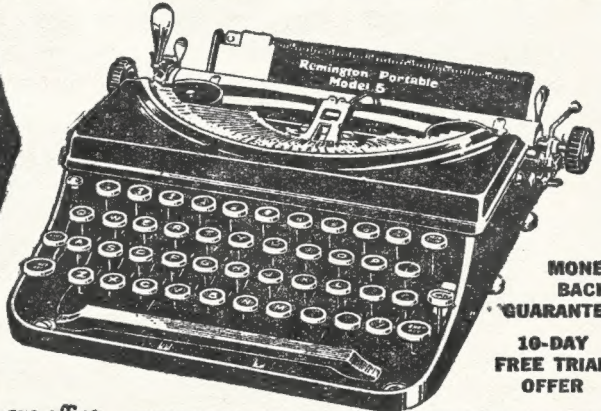
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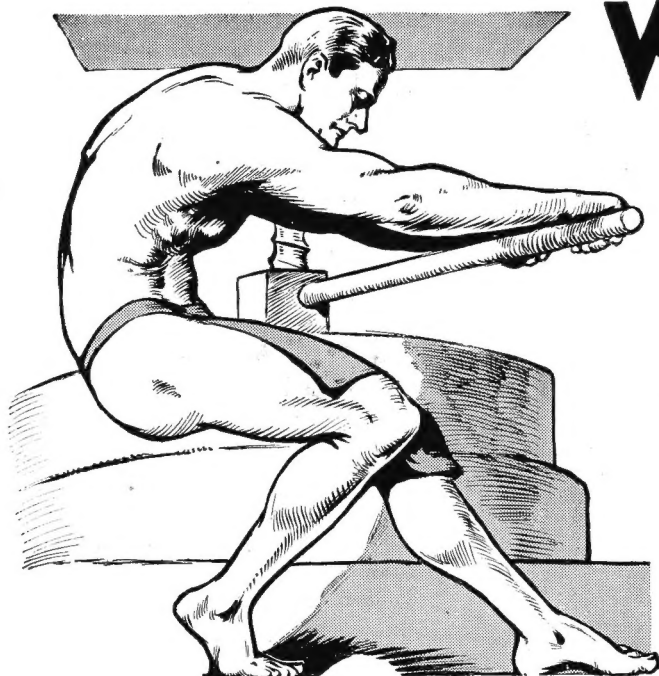
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"This is to certify that I have completely recovered from my rupture after wearing your Appliance for one year. It has been two years since I quit wearing your Appliance and I surely feel fine and not bothered with the rupture at all."—Albert J. Cupps, 960 Dodge St., Dubuque, Iowa.

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"I bought one of your Rupture Appliances in 1933, wore it day and night for one year and laid it aside last December. The rupture hasn't bothered me since. I used several others without success until I got a Brooks." J. B. McCarter, Route 2, Box 104, Oregon City, Ore.

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"My son has not worn the Appliance for over a year. He wore one for ten years and I am very grateful now to think he has laid it aside. He is twelve years old, runs and plays hard like all boys and is never bothered about the rupture."—Mrs. M. George, Route 1, Box 103, Cumberland, Md.

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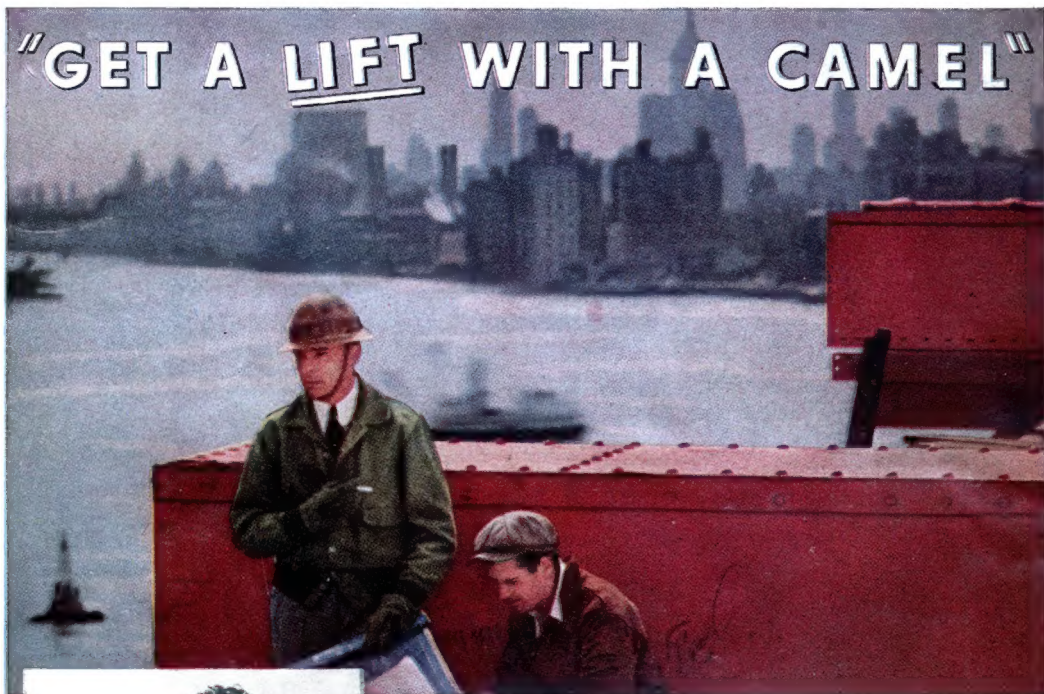
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